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A SHORT HISTORY
OF
THE ENGLISH CHURCH.



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A
SHORT HISTORY
OF
THE ENGLISH CHURCH,

Addressed to the Young.

FROM ITS FIRST ESTABLISHMENT TO THE
END OF THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD.

"O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have declared unto us, the noble works that Thou didst in their days, and in the old time before them."

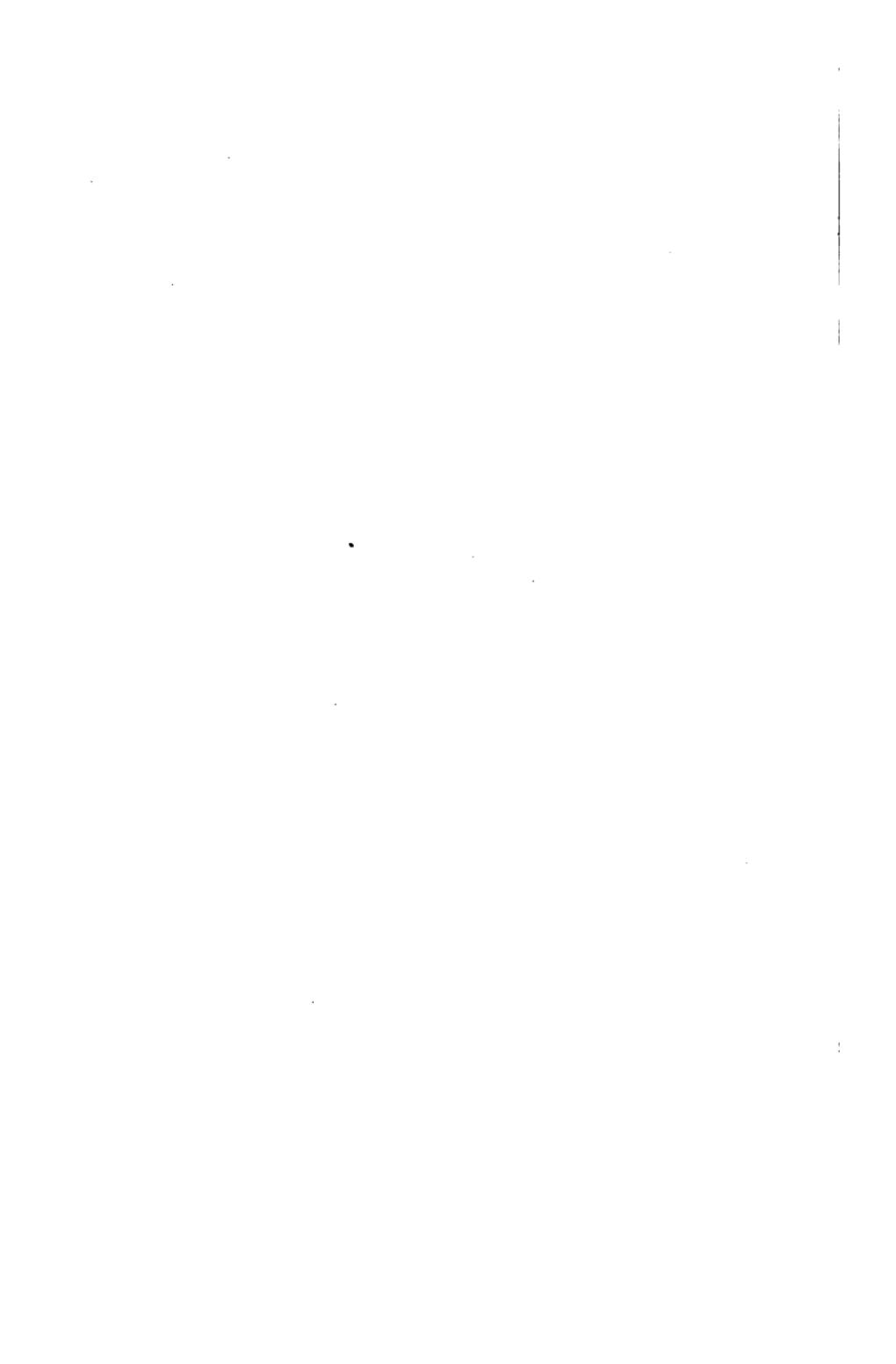
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THESE PAGES ARE INSCRIBED TO
My dear Children,
WITH THE EARNEST PRAYER
THAT THEY MAY BE DAILY "BUILT UP ON
THAT MOST HOLY FAITH" INTO WHICH
THEY HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED;
AND "CONTINUE CHRIST'S FAITHFUL SOLDIERS AND
SERVANTS UNTO THEIR LIVES' END."



PREFACE.

I HAVE often felt in my own family the need of a simple History of our English Church; a history written in an attractive form, suited to the capacities of children or young people, with anecdotes and sketches of character freely introduced, and yet dealing truly with plain historical facts. The following pages, which were originally written for the use of my own children, I now offer with all humility to the public, in the hope that they may prove useful and interesting to others also.

In these days, when the enemies of our ancient faith are so numerous and so active, it appears to me more than ever necessary that the generation now rising up should not be wholly ignorant of that branch of the Church Catholic into which they have been baptized.

When we look at the past history of our Church, and see the wonderful manner in which it has pleased God to preserve it through ages

of opposition and error, can we doubt that His blessing rests upon it? and ought we not faithfully to believe that He will still continue to guard and protect it through coming seasons of doubt and trial? May it be our earnest endeavour to teach our children to "hold fast the form of sound words," and to cling through all opposition to that glorious faith "which was once delivered to the saints," and which has been handed down to them by their pious ancestors from the earliest ages.

With regard to the composition of this little work, I feel deeply its many defects, but my sole aim has been to set forth the plain truth in a form suited to children. In order to make my meaning clearer, I have frequently chosen a short and simple word in preference to a longer but perhaps more suitable one, and so may occasionally have sacrificed the harmony of the sentence for the sake of being better understood.

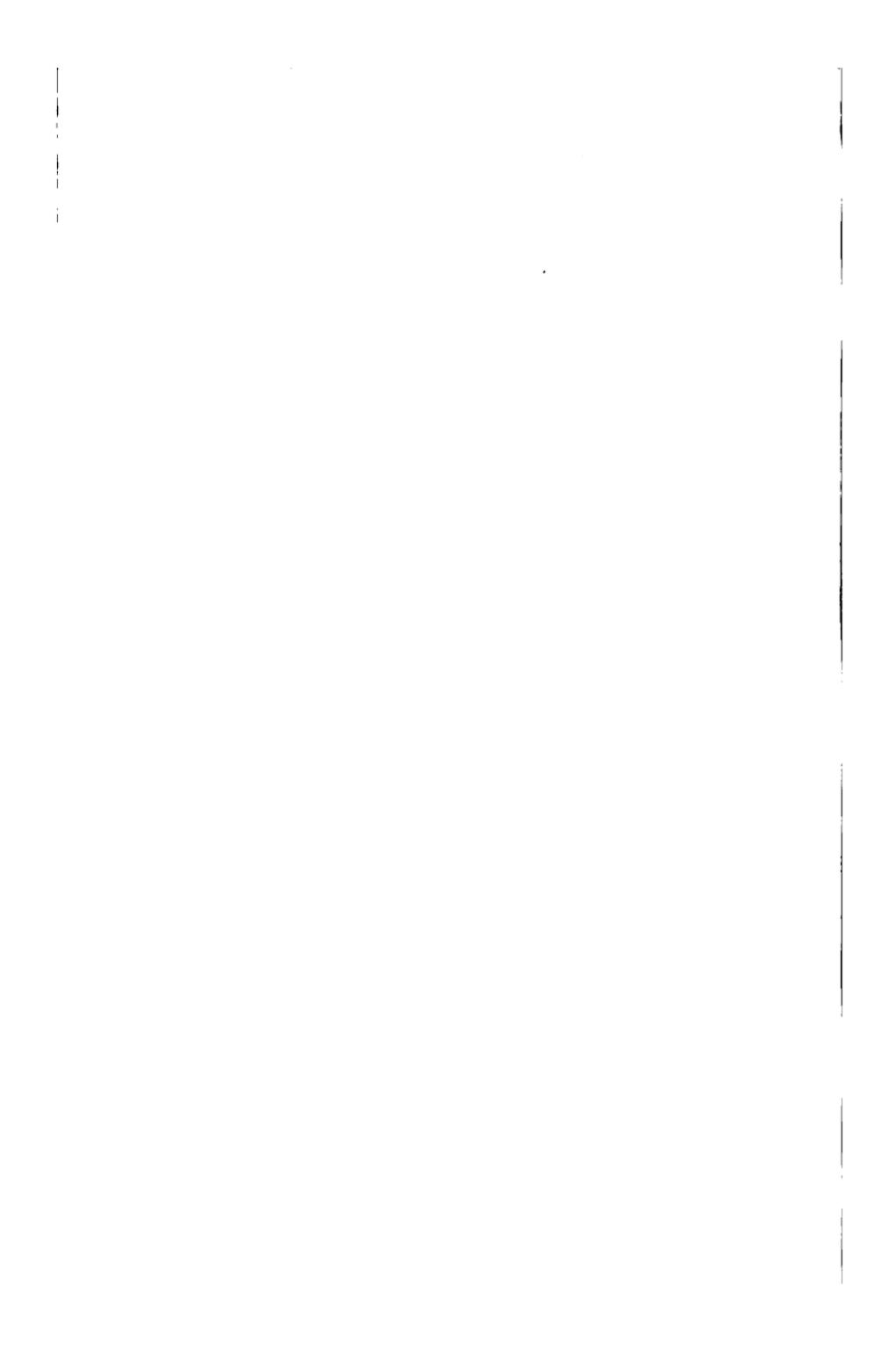
The early authorities I have consulted are Bede's Ecclesiastical History, and William of Malmesbury's English Chronicle, while the living authors to whom I am chiefly indebted are Archdeacon Churton, Dean Hook, Rev. C. Kingsley, and J. H. Parker, Esq., whose valuable little book on Gothic Architecture I have occasionally

referred to ; also Eccleston's "Introduction to English Antiquities."

I have also made selections from Neander's "Memorials of the Early Christian Life," and Southey's "Book of the Church."

M. C. S.

March, 1865.



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History of the English Church.

CHAPTER I.

THE ANCIENT DRUIDS, THEIR RELIGION AND RULES.

[A.D. 50.] You know, my dear children, you have read in your History of England, that many hundred years ago Julius Cæsar, the great Roman general, came over with his soldiers, and conquered the English people, who, you remember, were then called Britons.

They were not at all like what English people are now ; they went unclothed, their houses were made of wicker-work like baskets, they had no cattle feeding in the fields, and what was still worse, they had no churches, as we have, in which to worship and to praise God, and no Bible to tell them what God was like, and what He wished them to do.

But as we always find that savage people, when they have nothing to guide them, find out some sort of religion for themselves, and try to get some notion about God, so the Britons had a religion of their own. Their chief teachers and priests of religion were the Druids. These Druids worshipped a god whom they believed to be very great and powerful, but, to judge from the cruel

laws they imposed on the people, he must have been a god of vengeance and cruelty, not the loving Father you have been taught to worship. Religious rites were performed, and prayers offered up by the Druids, amidst the gloom of dense oak groves. Here, too, they worshipped the sun, instead of praising God only, who placed it in the heavens to give warmth and brightness to the earth, and can, when He chooses, hide its cheerful beams altogether. Once a-year a great number of people assembled, and walked in order to one of the sacred oaks. It was a very grand occasion, and you may be sure there was a great deal of pomp and show. A Druid in a white dress climbed the tree, and cut a piece of mistletoe with a golden knife; the prayers of the people were then offered up, and two white bulls sacrificed. After this there was much rejoicing and festivity.

It would have been well if the religious rites of these Druids ended with this simple sort of ceremony; but they taught the people that God required something more than their prayers and praises, and instead of teaching them they would please Him best by leading holy lives, and being "kind one to another," they compelled them to give up even their dear little ones as an offering to this god of wrath. How sad those poor parents must have felt when their children were led out to suffer a cruel death—their piteous cries for help drowned by the frantic yells of the people,

and the beating of drums. The prisoners they took in war were reserved for a fate quite as terrible; a large wicker image was prepared, into which the victims were thrust; a fire was lighted underneath, and the wretched beings consumed in the flames. By such bloody sacrifices did these poor blinded heathen hope to appease their angry god, and avert the horrors of war. Are you not glad that you have been taught a different religion to this? The Britons lived in such awe of these priests that they would not have dared to disobey them in the smallest matter. If any one was bold enough to keep to his own opinion, he was driven by command of the Druids into the deepest part of the thick wood, and there left a prey to hunger and wild beasts. Still, even in this world, there is nothing so bad but some good may be found in it, if we only take the trouble to search, and as I have told you much that is sad and wicked about the Druids and their religion, I will now try and remember something good.

First of all, the Druids taught the people much that was very useful about medicines, and by finding out the right sort of herbs, they often cured people who were ill, or at all events eased their pain. Then some of the Druids played on harps, and sang all sorts of songs about the courage and bravery of the old Britons, and these bards often encouraged the soldiers to fight very bravely in battle, and defend their country against enemies.

Once a-year, when all the corn was cut and the harvest was over, they set apart a day for solemnly thanking God; and all the people joined their praises with the Druids. Even Christian people would do well to imitate the wild Britons in this respect.

Before I end this chapter, and tell you how the Britons came to learn about Jesus Christ, and to worship the true God, I will just mention three very good things the Druids taught them :—

1st. They urged the rulers to provide laws for the good of the nation.

2ndly. They commanded the people to obey the laws.

3rdly. They taught them to bear trouble and pain with fortitude.

CHAPTER II.

HOW OUR LORD AND HIS APOSTLES FOUNDED THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.—EARLY DIFFICULTIES AND TROUBLES.
—BISHOPS.—SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY.

BEFORE I tell you how it happened that the Britons were taught to know the true God, and to give up worshipping the sun, and believing all the Druids told them, I must give you a short account of how people in other countries had learnt to worship God, and how it was that a great many believed in Jesus Christ, although

the Britons had not yet heard of Him or been taught to love Him; then I think you will better understand what I am going to talk about in this little book.

Now, dear children, every time you go to church or say your Catechism, you stand up and repeat the "Creed," as it is called; you do not pray, or ask God for anything in this Creed, but you merely say, before God and all the people, things which you believe to be true, and which you read in your Bible—for instance, that God made heaven and earth, and that Jesus Christ died and rose again for our sakes. I cannot now tell you the meaning of all the sentences in the Creed; it would take up too much time, and does not belong to our subject: but I am anxious to try and make you understand one of the sentences, because it has a great deal to do with what we are talking about. One of the things you say you believe in is the "Holy Catholic Church." Now the word "Church" is used to mean two quite different things, and I want you particularly to learn the difference between them.

When we speak of the building where we go to say our prayers and to praise God, we call it the "church," and when we go there we know we ought to behave quietly, and not whisper or think of play, as we do at home, because the "church" is God's House. Again, when we talk of people who believe in God and Jesus

Christ, and have been baptized into His Name, we call them (that is, the band of believers,) a "Church." And this is what we mean when we speak of the "Holy Catholic Church" in the Creed. The Epistles you find at the end of your Bible are "Letters" or "Epistles" written to all the Christians or believers in Christ living at that particular city or country and called a Church.

Thus there was a Church at Corinth, a city of Greece, a Church at Rome, and a Church at Jerusalem—that is, a certain number of people who believed in Christ, and had a Bishop or Chief Clergyman at their head. Now I want, in this little book, to give you a short account of the Church in our own dear England, that is, a history of those who believed in and worshipped the true God, from the time that the people knew no religion but that of the Druids till the hour when they were brought to know and worship God much in the same manner as you are taught to know and worship Him now. We shall, I dare say, find a good deal to make us sad, and many things to disappoint us; still I hope we may find something to interest and instruct us as well.

How is it that we in England are not now saying our prayers to the sun, as the Britons did, or worshipping idols of wood and stone, like so many poor heathen we read of in these days? Before I answer this question I must go back, for a little while, to the time when Jesus Christ went up

into heaven, and left those poor eleven men, His Apostles, alone, and as it seemed, without a friend upon earth. How sad, how very sad, they must have felt, as they stood gazing up into heaven, to see their only friend, their only hope, their only comfort, taken far, far out of sight: but it was of no use standing there; they must go, cheered by their Lord's promise of His continued presence, and obey His last command. And what was that command? "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." What! eleven poor, weak, ignorant men hope to teach the whole heathen world to believe, as God, a man who had been crucified as a deceiver, and forsake the religion they had been taught from little children to love and honour! Why, you will exclaim, nothing short of a miracle could do this! You are right, God did do something quite out of the common way to help them: Jesus Christ had promised to be with His disciples always, and to send the Holy Spirit to aid them in their very difficult work. These eleven poor, weak men became bold, earnest, and able to preach in a wonderful manner after the Holy Ghost was given them. So great was their success, that in a short time, we are told in the Bible, three thousand Jews became Christians, or believers in Christ, in one day, and "numbers were added to the Church daily," that is, a great

many joined the Apostles, believed in Christ's resurrection, and owned Him for their Lord and Saviour. A short time after we read of five thousand more believing.

The wonderful success of these despised followers of Jesus of Nazareth alarmed the Jewish rulers, and roused all their hatred; they tried by threats and persecution to stop the Apostles from preaching Christ; but all in vain, they boldly persevered in speaking the truth.

One man we read of in the Bible was specially zealous and active in searching for and punishing the Christians, and when the first martyr, St. Stephen, was stoned, "stood by, consenting to his death." You remember the wonderful manner in which it pleased God to make Saul, the persecutor, one of the greatest, bravest, and most zealous of His Apostles, and how after he had seen the bright light shine from heaven, and heard the gentle reproach, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" he shewed his zeal and love for Christ by spreading His truth in distant lands, and at last by laying down his life for that cause he had once so bitterly persecuted.

You must not forget that the religion taught by the Apostles was then quite new to all the heathen world; the Apostles of our Lord were not, like us, surrounded by numbers who loved God and worshipped Him, but by men who regarded them and their religion with the greatest

hatred, because they told the rich and powerful they must give up all the cruel ways they so much loved, forgive their enemies instead of hating them, worship only one God, and forsake the gods they held so sacred. No wonder the Emperors of Rome, heathen as they were, did all they could to put an end to this strange, and, as they thought, hateful religion. You have read of the dreadful way in which the Christians were murdered and tortured, to make them deny Christ; but God was with them, and the more they suffered the more people believed in them, and began to think there must be some truth in a religion which could give such hope and courage in the hour of death. The worst thing a famous heathen Governor could find to say against these despised people, when he sent a report of them to the Emperor Trajan, was this, "that they were wont to meet together on a stated day before it was light, and sing among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ as God; to take an oath not to do anything wicked, such as thieving and robbing, and never to speak an untruth; when these things were performed it was their custom to part and meet again to eat together, which they did quietly and orderly; but this they have given up," he adds, "since I gave them your command that you would not allow a great many people to meet together."

The Apostles spent the whole of their time

in going about to different towns and countries, teaching and persuading the people to believe in the true God, and wherever a certain number believed, there a Christian Church was founded. While the Apostles lived, they were chief over all the other clergymen, and when anything had to be settled or put in order, they were called on to give their advice, and decide the matter. Before they died, they chose out other good men, many of whom they had known as friends, and made them in their stead bishops or chiefs over the different Churches. Thus there was a Bishop of Rome, of Jerusalem, of Antioch, &c.

You may be sure wherever the Apostles went, and Churches were founded, Christianity spread; but I fear this has been rather a long chapter, so I will tell you, in the next, how in dear old England a Christian Church was founded, and the people learnt to worship the true God.

CHAPTER III.

DESTRUCTION OF THE DRUIDS.—FIRST PLANTING OF CHRISTIANITY IN BRITAIN.—PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH.—ST. ALBAN.

[A.D. 50—303.] JULIUS CÆSAR landed with his soldiers on the shores of Britain fifty-five years before Jesus Christ was born, but you must not suppose he found it an easy matter to conquer the

country. So many bloody battles were fought, and the Romans lost so many men and ships, that they were several times on the point of giving up all hope of subduing these brave, hardy savages. Though the Romans had plenty of weapons to fight with, and armour to protect their bodies, more than one hundred years passed before they really conquered this little island. The poor naked Britons were fighting for all they held most dear—their freedom, their country, and their religion; and this it was that made them fight, as Julius Cæsar said, “more like devils than men.”

As I have already told you, the Britons were guided in everything by the Druids, and as the Romans found they were always urging on the people by their wild war-songs to defend their religion and their country, they determined if possible to destroy all the Druids and their sacred groves. I dare say the poor Britons thought that all must be over when they saw their priests murdered, and the religion they had been taught to reverence and love destroyed; but you will see by-and-by that God made them wiser and happier than they had ever been before, while the heathen Romans, unknown to themselves, were by these cruel acts preparing the way for a far higher, nobler, and holier faith, a faith which would give these poor savages patience and comfort under trouble, and open to them the gates

a glorious life of peace and happiness beyond the grave.

I wish I could really tell you who that holy and brave man was who first ventured to teach a religion so utterly opposed to that of the Druids and Romans, but it is now so many years ago, and there are such a number of different opinions on the subject, that it is no very easy matter to decide which seems most likely to be the true one. Some suppose that Joseph of Arimathea (that brave man who, when it was almost death to profess a belief in the crucified Saviour, came and begged His lifeless body of Pilate, and "laid it in his own new tomb,") was the first to tell the heathen Britons of a living Christ. Then, again, we are told that St. Paul (who we know travelled far and wide, and endured every kind of hardship in his holy work of teaching the true God) visited Britain ; at all events, after his first imprisonment at Rome, which we read of in the last chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, he lived eight or ten years, and spent those years entirely in preaching to the heathen. One of his chief friends, Clement, who was afterwards Bishop of Rome, speaks of St. Paul going to the "far west," and if you will turn over your Bible and read the twenty-eighth verse of the fifteenth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, you will see that St. Paul speaks of his intention of visiting Spain, and then he would most likely have crossed over to Britain at the

same time. Be this as it may, we know that at the time the Romans had quite conquered Britain, a vast number of heathens had become Christians in other countries, and doubtless there were many fighting like brave men in England under the Roman generals. Think how grieved they must have felt when they saw the poor Britons saying their prayers to the sun, and thinking to please God and the Druids by offering their children in sacrifice, and how anxious they must have felt to teach these poor conquered savages what they had found so full of comfort and hope themselves. Let there be but the "will," God gives to every one, even to ignorant people and little children, the power to do something for Him; and I cannot help thinking that these Christian soldiers, few and despised though they may have been, were the means, under God, of founding the Church in Britain, and spreading light and hope through the darkened land.

[A.D. 200.] There is every reason to believe that a hundred years after the Apostles were dead, many churches had been built in Britain where the true God received praise and worship. It is interesting to know that the Claudia mentioned by St. Paul in the twenty-first verse of the fourth chapter of the second Epistle to Timothy is supposed by some writers to have been a British lady of great beauty and wit, the Christian wife of Pudens, a soldier in the Roman army

her brother is supposed to have been that same Cyllen, or Linus, mentioned by St. Paul in the same passage, and afterwards first Bishop of the Church of Rome.

There is also a story told (for the truth of which I cannot vouch), that in the year 173 Lucius, a British king, and grandson of this Linus, wrote to Eleutherus, then Bishop of Rome, to send some clergymen to teach his people. At all events we may believe what Tertullian, the great Christian writer, says about the year 200. He speaks of those parts of Britain "not yet conquered by the Romans, being yet subject to Christ;" so you see where the Roman arms could not penetrate, God's truth had made its way in.

In my second chapter I told you how much the heathen Emperors of Rome hated the Christians and their religion; a great many of them did all they could to find out the Christians, and when they refused to offer sacrifice, and worship the heathen gods, they put them to cruel deaths, hoping by this means to get rid of them altogether; but God, who so often brings good out of evil, caused many more to believe in the religion of these poor tortured, dying men, and the more the Emperors forbade it, the more people persisted in saying their prayers to Christ.

In the year 298 the Roman Emperor Diocletian published an edict that all Christians who refused to worship idols should be put to death, and their

churches burnt to the ground. Many of the best and holiest Christians gave up their lives rather than deny Christ, but it is generally supposed that not many in our country suffered in this last dreadful "persecution," as it is called. Do you remember the sentence in that fine old hymn, the *Te Deum*, you hear chanted so often in church, "The noble army of martyrs praise Thee?" Perhaps you may not know that these brave men and women who died rather than give up their faith, are called "martyrs," and as many of them expired with God's praises on their lips, so even now they join with us on earth, and with the angels, praising Him in heaven.

You will often read sad stories of these good martyrs, and although we may hope never in these days to suffer as they did, we may learn some very useful lessons from their courage and patience. I must not conclude this chapter without mentioning St. Alban. He is generally supposed to have been the first English martyr. He left his own country to fight for the Emperor Diocletian in the Roman army, and on his return to Britain, struck with the contrast between his own cruel religion and the patience and holiness of those who had become Christians, he secretly believed in the truth. We are told, however, that he was publicly brought to confess his belief by the holy example of a poor Christian priest he had sheltered under his roof.

When the house was searched, Alban nobly exchanged clothes with the priest in order that he might escape his enemies. This kind act led to his discovery, and when dragged away to the torture he boldly declared before all the army that he believed in Christ, and would worship only one God. His fate was sealed, and the Saviour he refused to deny on earth prepared for him a home of joy and happiness in heaven. There is a place in Hertfordshire named after this our first Christian martyr, and a fine old abbey, which has lately been restored, was afterwards built to his memory. You must think of him if ever you see it, and wonder if that is indeed the spot where St. Alban suffered nearly sixteen hundred years ago.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THE CHRISTIAN FAITH TRIUMPHED UNDER CONSTANTINE.—USE OF BISHOPS.—PLAN OF THE BRITISH CHURCH.

[A.D. 306.] You will find, dear children, in reading history, that one of the most useful lessons we may learn is that God watches over and orders every event, and when things seem most dark, and evil appears all but to overpower what is good, He raises up some great or holy man to do the work He has in hand, and protect what is

true. The spot is still shewn at York where the Empress Helena, a British lady, is supposed to have given birth to the first Christian Emperor of Rome. The walls of the prætorium at York rang with shouts of joy when Constantine the Great was proclaimed Emperor of the world. As Englishmen we cannot but feel proud that our country should have given birth to so famous a man. When the Christian's last spark of hope seemed about to be put out, and the heathen religion to prevail, God raised up Constantine to cherish the spark, until it became a great and living flame. During the reign of the wicked Emperor Diocletian, Constantius, the father of Constantine, together with his son, was appointed Governor of our island, and this will in a great measure help us to understand why the Britons suffered comparatively little in the persecution. In the year 306 Constantine enters Rome in triumph as Emperor, and all cruelties against the followers of Christ cease. Christians are favoured, and their religion encouraged throughout the world. Our own little island shares in the general joy, churches spring up everywhere, and numbers join a religion which is favoured and upheld by the greatest sovereign of the world. A great Christian writer of the time thus describes the general joy. After speaking of the virtues and goodness of Constantine, he adds: "The Christians now no longer feared those who had so

cruelly used them ; they celebrated splendid and festive days with joy and hilarity ; all things were filled with light, and all who before were sunk in sorrow looked at each other with smiling, cheerful faces. With choirs and hymns in the cities and villages they praised God, the universal King, and extolled the pious Emperor. There was perfect forgetfulness of former evil, and all past wickedness was buried in oblivion. There was nothing but enjoyment of present blessings, and hope of those yet to come. Edicts were published and issued by the victorious Emperor full of clemency, and laws were made full of charity and true religion^a."

On looking back at the rules which were laid down for the British Church, it is interesting to find that in many important respects it is very like our own English Church of the present day. First of all, there were the bishops at its head—of this fact we are certain, because in the year 314 three British bishops were present at a large meeting of different foreign bishops held at the town of Arles, in France. These meetings, which are generally called "Councils," did good in many ways. First, they gave the bishops an opportunity of talking over matters together, and consulting as to what was best for the good of their people ; and then they helped one another by proposing new and useful plans, which some might

^a Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History, p. 419.

not have thought of. It may have happened, too, that while they were separated at their different homes, they disagreed about various things, and felt aggrieved and angry with other bishops, who could not think as they did ; but when they came to meet together and talk over the matter calmly, they often found that, after all, there was not so much difference in their ideas, and they would agree to decide the point amicably, by each giving way a little. Again, there were often matters of religion which people could not agree about, and as this difference of opinion sometimes caused a great deal of quarrelling and ill-feeling among Christians, many were glad when the bishops met together and decided the point, which they often tried to do fairly, and for the benefit of all parties ; indeed the chief object of these early Councils was, to preserve the true faith from being corrupted, and to give the bishops an opportunity of protesting against any false or unscriptural doctrine. But like many other things, good in themselves, these meetings became very much abused in after ages ; laws were made which would fain have compelled the people to believe a great deal more than the first Christians taught, or God has told us in the Bible, and which therefore could not promote their welfare.

Now that we are talking about the British bishops, I must just explain what duties they had to perform, and in what way they were a benefi

to the Church. Suppose that at this time England was at war with some foreign country, and the Queen wanted to send out a large army of soldiers to fight the enemy, think for a moment what kind of men would be required to make the army complete. First of all would come the soldiers of the line, brave fellows, ready to fight for their sovereign and country; then come the officers, whose duty it is to superintend their different regiments, and last of all, and most necessary of all, the commanding "officer," or "general," who decides all matters of importance, and to whom the whole army look for guidance and advice in the hour of danger. Imagine the hopeless state of confusion the army would be in without such a chief at its head. Probably just when all depended on every one acting together, and being of the same mind, each officer would be trying to carry his own point, and the enemy would have but little difficulty in conquering a foe so divided amongst themselves.

Bishops in God's Church are like commanding officers; they hold together and watch over the members of Christ's Church committed to them; and although there have been bad, tyrannical bishops, as well as unworthy generals, it would be wrong in either case to say they were not needed because some failed to do their duty.

I told you, in my second chapter, that before the Apostles died, they ordained bishops to supply

their places. Besides ruling the Christians committed to their charge, the bishops appointed, as they do now, a certain number of earnest men to assist them in teaching and preaching to the people. At the time of which I am speaking, many of the clergymen so ordained lived a good many together in large houses, called monasteries, and as they were almost the only people who could read and write, they established schools in these houses, where children were taught all that was good and useful; and in times of war or famine the poor distressed people could always find a refuge within these friendly walls.

Some of the clergy married, and lived in different villages about the country, where they taught their people from the parish church^b. The British bishops and clergy were very anxious that those over whom they were placed should know and understand the Scriptures; the clergy were well instructed in the sacred volume, written copies of which in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin were freely circulated in the monasteries, and several of the prayers we use now were offered up by the British Christians in their churches.

^b Bede, Ecclesiastical History, p. 16.

CHAPTER V.

HOW THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND BECAME CHRISTIANS.—

STORY OF ST. PATRICK.—FALSE TEACHING OF PELAGIUS.—THE FRENCH BISHOPS CONVINCED THE PEOPLE OF THE TRUTH.—INVASION OF THE SAXONS, AND DISTRESS OF THE BRITONS.

[A.D. 373—426.] IF you look at the Map of Europe, you will see on the West of England the island you have so often read of, called Ireland, and you remember when we speak of England, Scotland, and Ireland, all together, we call it Great Britain and Ireland.

Now that I have told you how the Christian Church was planted in Britain, I will try and relate how the heathen people of Ireland, and afterwards of Scotland, came to know and worship the true God.

Through the wild forests and over the shaggy mountains of Ireland wandered a friendless, solitary captive. Taken from his happy home in North Britain at the age of sixteen, the youth Succat had no companions but his herd of swine, and the fierce savages who surrounded him. But you know, dear children, God sends us trouble and sorrow that we may learn our duty, and trust entirely to His guidance; and you will see in the case of Succat how He brought good out of all this seeming evil and injustice. Like many others,

Succat, before his trouble came upon him, had set a very light value on God's blessings. What would he not now have given to have been back again in his happy home, listening to the Christian advice of his good mother, whose words he seemed to heed so little at the time! Often must this kind mother's heart have been saddened by the reckless disregard her thoughtless boy shewed for her wise counsel, and the little effect her good example and loving words seemed to have on him. But God tells us that if we "cast our bread upon the waters, we shall find it after many days ;" and although years may pass before the seed sown seems likely to spring up and bear fruit, still those words of truth remain : "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." In his forlorn state Succat remembered his Christian mother's teaching, and turned to the God he had so long neglected for help and comfort. Years passed away, and Succat was rescued from his captivity, but the scenes he had witnessed among the rude heathen of Ireland were never forgotten ; his heart burned with a noble longing to spread among them that blessed religion which had given him comfort and hope when all other comforts had failed, and before long he again appeared on the scene of his former trials, now to be the scene of his triumph. Succat knew the language of these wild Irish, and when he had collected num-

bers together in the fields by beating a drum, he told them in their own tongue the wonderful history of the Son of God, and urged them with words full of eloquence to turn from worshipping idols, and embrace the faith of Christ. This obscure Scotch youth was the famous St. Patrick, founder of the Irish Church. His labours were crowned with signal success, and during the forty years he preached to the people, numbers believed in God, and forsook their old form of heathen worship. St. Patrick founded a great many schools, churches, and monasteries in Ireland, and spent the last few years of his long and active life in meditating on the love and goodness of God. Though he endured every hardship, and succeeded in doing so much good for others, St. Patrick's humility was remarkable ; his only desire seems to have been, that God should have all the glory of the work. After speaking in one of his letters of the wonders God had allowed him to perform among the heathen, he adds : " Yet I conjure all persons, let no one on account of these or similar things, believe that I place myself on a level with the Apostles or any of the perfected saints, for I am a poor sinful despicable man ." This good Christian died at a great age about the year 493.

In the meantime I must tell you how the British Church began to suffer from troubles, both within and without. Morgan, or Pelagius, as he is gene-

* Neander's Memorials of the Early Christian Life, p. 430.

rally called, was a native of Wales, where many of the old Druids and their followers had taken refuge. So great a hold had the old religion of the Druids on the people, that it was a long time before they could be persuaded to give up all the customs they had held so dear ; and many of the old Druid notions seem with some to have been sadly mixed up with the new and purer faith. Morgan was a clever man, and had in his youth travelled a great deal in other countries, and talked with some of the best and wisest men of the time, but much that he taught was contrary to the Christian faith, and could not be proved by the Bible. We are certainly not told there, as Pelagius tried to make the people believe, that we do not want God's help to make us act rightly, but that there is enough good in ourselves to save us from going to hell. We know that although many have a great longing and wish to do right, as I daresay this Morgan had, yet without God's help we are very weak, and when others tempt us to do a wrong thing, we should find great difficulty in refusing unless we asked God to give us strength, and put good thoughts into our hearts just at the right time. The British bishops and many other good men were very sorry to find that numbers of people liked what Morgan taught, and felt a sort of pride in the idea of being able to save themselves without God's help ; so they wisely determined to invite over two very good

and clever French bishops to preach to the people, and to shew them that they were in the wrong; then after both sides of the question had been fairly discussed, the people could decide in their own minds which seemed the truth, and thus avoid professing what they did not believe. These good French bishops, Germanus and Lupus, were received with great respect by the British Christians, and numbers flocked to hear them in the open fields; they preached so earnestly, and proved all they said so well from the Bible, that even the false teachers themselves could not help owning they had been in the wrong; and when the bishops condemned the new ideas, their decision was received with a shout of joy. Now that the true doctrine had been preached to the people, probably many, who before had been wavering and unsettled in their minds, became firmly convinced of the truth, and embraced it with all their hearts. So you see God brought good out of all this trouble.

A time of great trial was now at hand for Britain. The people had lately been much annoyed by the attacks of the Picts and Scots from the North. Up to this time the Romans had sent brave generals over, and these wild invaders had been driven back. Now, however, the Britons were soon to lose their protectors altogether, that they might, through sad experience, learn the lesson that "it is better to trust in God than to

put any confidence in man." Surrounded by enemies at home, the Romans were forced to withdraw nearly all their soldiers from Britain, and as a great many of the best and bravest of the British youths were in the Roman army, the country was deprived of them at the same time.

It was the custom with the Romans to take away all weapons of war from the people they had conquered, so the poor Britons were exposed, in their helpless state, to all the horrors of an unequal war with fierce barbarians. The Romans made one last effort to help them by rebuilding a strong wall built by the Emperor Severus in the north, to protect the country from the Picts and Scots; but in the year 426 the Romans were obliged to retire altogether, and then the northern barbarians broke down the wall and continued their bloody inroads. At the same time the fierce Saxons and Angles from Germany landed on different parts of the coast and committed all sorts of cruelties.

I feel very sorry to have to close this chapter so sadly, but you will I hope see as we go on, that God caused all this evil to work together for the final good of His people.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW ST. GERMAIN HELPED THE BRITONS.—ANCIENT
BRITISH MONASTERIES.—THEIR USE.—LETTER OF
A BRITISH BISHOP.—STORY OF ST. COLUMBA.—
CONVERSION OF THE SCOTS.

[A.D. 426 to 548.] I MUST now tell you a little more about that good man St. Germain, who had not forgotten the Britons; and as they had been so willing to listen to him before in the matter of Morgan, he determined to visit them in their distress, and give them the benefit of his help and counsel. There is a story told of him which shews that he was a brave as well as a good man. A number of Britons had assembled in the North, hoping to drive away the Picts and Scots, who were about to attack them. Germain hastened to the spot to help them by his encouragement and advice; he formed a clever plan by which the barbarians were surrounded and completely defeated. This battle has sometimes been called the “Hallelujah” victory, from the shouts raised by the Christian soldiers, as the enemy fled. It took place at Easter.

Now that the Romans had left Britain, a great many of the good schools they had built became during this time of distress deserted. St. Germain persuaded the clergy and people (many of whom had taken refuge in the mountainous parts of

Wales and Cornwall) to build some more large monasteries, to take the place of the Roman schools, and afford a refuge for the poor when the country was overrun by invaders. You must remember that in those days people had no printed books as we have now, to read in; and although I told you copies of the Bible were to be found in most of the British monasteries, you must bear in mind that these copies were not printed in letters on paper like our Bibles now, but every word had to be copied out with a pen. Imagine the labour of such a work as this! Take up your Bible and try merely to count the verses and then you will be able to form some notion of the patience required to write out every word of the sacred book. The clergy who lived in the monasteries were called "monks." A certain number of these monks were employed in taking copies of the Scripture; each had a separate cell, a small room, allotted to him, and perfect silence was enjoined, that all mistakes might be avoided. St. Germain wisely saw that in these times of trouble and confusion the only chance of preserving true learning and keeping alive the Holy Scriptures, was to provide a safe refuge for these good and clever men, where they could perform their difficult task unmolested.

Most bravely and nobly was the work fulfilled;—when ruin, misery, and ignorance reigned all around, there rose the solitary monastery, where

the young were taught a noble faith, the poor fed, the friendless and aged sheltered, the wretched consoled. It was God alone who raised those monasteries, and sent forth those monks on their holy errand.

In these days of books and wisdom, some are led to look with contempt on these Christian men, and scoff at and ridicule what they call their ignorance and superstition; but will it not do us more good to dwell on their love, their patience, and their boldness? remembering that God at this period, as well as in all other ages, raised up just the right sort of people, at the right time, to do the work He had in hand; and though we may think different sort of men could have done the work better, God judged otherwise, and we dare not question His wisdom. Surely, deep is the debt of gratitude we owe these noble men, who in the midst of violence, oppression, persecution, and hardship, handed down to us, through ages of darkness and error, that "Word which giveth light and understanding to the simple." Truly they "sowed in tears what we have reaped in joy."

Many are the stories told of the way in which the fierce invader was arrested in his course of plunder and murder, and compelled in spite of himself to bow before the superior wisdom and holiness of these Christian men. That you may understand what I mean I will just re-

late a story of the good and brave St. Germain, although it has nothing to do with the history of our own country. A savage heathen chief attacked the part of France where St. Germain lived. The cruel warrior with his fierce eyes glaring vengeance, and his beard and hair floating in the wind, must have been a sight to strike terror into the bravest heart, followed, too, as he was, by a band of armed savages, who spread death and desolation wherever they went. But Germain had no fear of death; he rushed forward, and seizing the warrior-king's prancing horse by the bridle, commanded him in the name of the God he served, to desist from his cruel purpose and spare the helpless people. The barbarian, awed and astounded by this Christian man's boldness, retreated, and the country was saved. LUPUS, who I told you was the friend and companion of Germain, seems to have so completely gained the respect of the fierce conqueror Attila, that he is said to have asked LUPUS to pray for him.

I think it will interest you if I quote a few words from a writer of this age, which will shew you the respect with which these good men were regarded. "The Bishop converts many to God by a holy life and by holy preaching; he does nothing in a haughty manner, but always acts with humility. By the striving of holy love he places himself on an equality with those who are

subject to him. By his conduct and preaching he seeks not his own glory, but the glory of Christ ; all the honour shewn him he refers back to God ; he consoles the dejected ; he feeds the poor ; he gives to those who are in despair the hope of the forgiveness of sins ; he urges on those who are doing right ; he spreads light among those who are wandering. Such a man is a minister of the Word, he understands God's voice, and is for others an oracle of the Holy Spirit^d." O that bishops in after ages had acted up to this holy pattern !

But to return to St. Germain. He founded a great many monasteries in Britain, and there is a place in Cornwall named after him, "St. Germain's."

As I think you should know a little what the British bishops and priests^e taught, I will give you a passage from the writings of a good Bishop of the time ; and you will see that they not only led their people to believe in Christ, but that they also taught them to love and serve God by leading holy lives. The passage I have chosen is taken from a letter written by this bishop to a widowed lady, and is full of sensible Christian

^d Julianus. See Neander's Memorials of Early Christian Life, p. 345.

^e "Priest" is only another name for presbyter or elder, and is given to those clergymen who come next in order to the bishop. You often find it used in your Prayer-book.

advice. After saying that it is vain to expect God to have mercy on us unless we try and do His will, he adds, "Let no man deceive his brother. Except a man is righteous he hath not life. Except he keep the commandments of Christ, he hath no part with Him. A Christian is one who shews mercy to all; who is provoked by no wrong; who suffers not the poor to be oppressed; who relieves the wretched; succours the needy; who mourns with mourners and feels the pain of another as his own; who is moved to tears by the sight of another's tears; whose house is opened to all; whose table is spread for the poor; whose good deeds all men know; whose wrongful dealing no man feels; who serves God day and night, and ever meditates upon His precepts; who is made poor to the world that he may be rich towards God; who is content to be inglorious among men, that he may appear glorious before God and His angels; who has no deceit in his heart; whose soul is simple and undefiled, and his conscience faithful and pure; whose whole mind rests on God; whose whole hope is fixed on Christ¹."

Surely you will say this good man has read his Bible, and profited by it too; advice like this is as well suited to us, as it was to the ancient British Christians.

In a former chapter I promised to tell you how

¹ Fastidius, Bishop of London. See Churton's History of the Early English Church, p. 16.

the heathen people of Scotland were many of them brought to believe in God, and how in these troublous times He raised up good men to prevent the flame of truth from dying out. I hope you have not forgotten what I told you about Succat or St. Patrick, and how he converted the Irish, and established monasteries all over the island. In one of these monasteries lived a holy man named Columba. He had heard the history of its pious founder, and admired the earnestness of the poor Scotch youth; he had often heard, too, of the heathen state of St. Patrick's native land, and longed to shew his gratitude to that good man for all the benefits he had received from him by preaching the truth in Scotland, in the same way as Patrick had done in Ireland nearly two hundred years before.

Columba must have been a brave man to have started with only a few companions in a little frail boat made of osiers and skins, and to have landed on a shore where he could only have expected to meet enemies. Columba and his companions landed on the little island of Iona, which was then a refuge for the last of the Druids. The difficulties and dangers that surrounded them were great, but they were by no means daunted by them; and not long after their arrival this small island of Iona became the centre from which the light of truth shone in the darkness around.

Columba seems to have had the power of drawing the wild Scots to him in a remarkable manner. His countenance was fine and open, and his voice so clear and powerful, that when he chanted the Psalms in the open air, the words and melody could be heard a long way off. But apart from his teaching, Columba's holy life and noble example led numbers to believe in the truth of which he preached, and he and his monks were everywhere received with respect. The good man's chief delight was the study of the Bible, and he never read it without praying to God to help him to understand and obey its precepts. That you may form some idea of his tender gentleness of disposition, I will relate a touching little incident which occurred just before his death, and which shews that he thought it not beneath his notice to gain the affections of dumb animals, as well as those of men and women. When Columba became old and infirm he was one day walking with a friend near the monastery, and just as he had sat down to rest by the road side, an old white horse, which was used by the monks to carry milk to the monastery, came up to Columba and quietly rested his nose on the abbot's breast. He had not forgotten the kind friend who had so often fed and caressed him. Columba's companion was about to drive the grateful animal away, but the Abbot forbade him, saying, "Let him alone, for he loves me ; God hath planted affection even in beasts."

This good man's last words to his monks breathe the same loving Christian spirit. "My last request, dear children," he said, "is, that you live in perfect peace and charity with one another; if you do this, as the saints have done before you, God, the comforter of the good, will surely bless you."

I cannot do better than conclude this chapter with one of Columba's charitable and wise sayings, and one which he always put into practice: "When any one has offended *me* I forgive him, when any one offends *God* I pray for him."

CHAPTER VII.

INVASION OF THE SAXONS.—THEIR RELIGION.—GREGORY THE GREAT.—HOW HE DETERMINED TO TEACH CHRISTIANITY TO THE HEATHEN SAXONS.

[A.D. 500—596.] At the end of the fifth chapter I told you that while the fierce Picts and Scots attacked the Britons in the North, the piratical Saxons landed on different parts of the coast, and committed dreadful ravages. In an evil hour, as it then seemed to our country, the poor harassed Britons invited over these Saxons to help them against their other enemies; and attracted by the pleasant appearance of the island, in spite of its fogs and mist, the Saxons resolved to give up their roving habits, and settle in a country which they found could be so easily conquered.

You have already read in your History of England how these hardy Saxons drove those Britons who survived into the wilds of Cornwall and Wales, and how they finally settled in England, and divided the country into seven different provinces, each governed by its king. When I tell you these Saxons were heathen, and hated all who did not worship their false gods, you can form some notion of the state of the British Church at this period. The Saxons attacked the religion as well as the property of the people. They destroyed the churches, and the clergy, wherever they found them, and deprived the unfortunate Britons of all comfort, so far as the outward ordinances of religion were concerned. Their gods were all gods of war and carnage, so they thought they could best please these gods by ravaging and destroying wherever they came. Is it not curious that our days of the week are all named after these Saxon war-gods. "Sunday," the Sun's day; "Monday," the Moon's day; "Tuesday," Tiow's day; "Wednesday," Woden's day, and so on.

The Saxons seem to have had a dim notion of a God who ruled over the earth, but like the God of the old Druids, they imagined him to be a cruel, vengeful deity, loving bloodshed and human sacrifices. Surely, you will exclaim, the British Christians must have thought that God intended to forsake them altogether. He permitted the heathen

invaders to destroy the churches and murder the clergy, and it seemed to be His will that the light of Christianity should be utterly put out. But as we proceed we shall find that God willed it far otherwise, and that out of this mass of misery and evil it pleased Him to raise a glorious Church.

One of the most interesting lessons we may learn from the study of the history of Christianity, is, that God has never once deserted His faithful people, nor allowed their enemies wholly to prevail. Seasons there have been, and must still be, of thick darkness and bitter despair; but the light of truth never has, and never will be entirely extinguished. Often the sun shines behind a cloud, and for a time is hidden from our view; but when we least expect it, the bright sunbeam bursts forth, and we feel God's sun has been with us all the time, although its cheerful warmth was withheld from us for a space.

When God withdraws our blessings, then it is we feel the real value of them. In this time of trouble and distress, the poor British Christians longed in vain for those religious helps God had once so bountifully bestowed upon them; and deeply did they feel their need of them, now that they were removed. Although we do not read of any instances of the Saxons being brought to know the true God by the influence and teaching of the Britons, the conquerors were probably softened and subdued by contact with the natives

who remained their slaves; and I feel sure that the way was partly opened for those good men who by-and-by landed on the shores of England, to teach the wild Saxons a purer religion than that of Woden and Thor. We are told that the two British Bishops of London and York were the last to flee from their people before the warlike Saxons. They settled in the West of England, and for a long time the Christian faith flourished there in comparative safety.

As I before told you, there is nothing in this world so bad but that some good may be found in it; and the Saxons, though heathen, had some noble ideas, and some very wise laws too. It is a curious fact that our word "God" is derived from them, and signifies "the Good;" so although, as I before said, they thought God took pleasure in cruelty and war, they yet must have had some notion of His love of justice also; for they punished wickedness and immorality, and seem to have treated their women with respect and kindness. Indeed they expressed their surprise that the Romans could go so often to theatres and other places of amusement, and leave their wives and children at home^s. Then the Saxons were honest, brave, and sober, and firm even to obstinacy; and when these qualities became softened by contact with the lighter and less solid character of the Briton, the result was good for the nation at

^s Eccleston's English Antiquities.

large. If the Saxons had not subdued the Britons, and settled among them, making in time one nation, our religion might not have been so pure, or our characters so well balanced. So you see even out of all this trouble God brought good to our country.

Though the Saxons were heathen, and had but a dim notion of the true God, still I doubt whether the Romans, with all their refinement, would have been so ready to believe in Christ, as we shall see these hardy Norsemen were! Be that as it may, the time had come for God's offer of mercy, and we shall see how that offer was received.

We must now leave England for a short space of time, and turn our eyes to the ancient city of Rome. That noble empire was fast falling into decay; vast hordes of barbarians from the North swept over the sunny plains and rocky mountains of Italy, carrying death and destruction wherever they came. In the midst of this scene of wreck and confusion God's Church still survived, and inspired the sinking hearts of the conquered people with hope and comfort. There was a good priest at Rome named Gregory, who by his piety, earnestness, and devotion had gained the love and respect of all the people; his wise counsel had several times saved his city in the hour of difficulty and distress, and he was held in such high esteem, that all public matters were referred to him; and at the age of forty, wearied out by his

heavy duties and many anxieties, he retired to a monastery he had founded, hoping in this quiet retreat to fulfil the wish of his heart, and give the remaining years of his life to the study of the Scriptures, and meditation upon God. But the God he served willed it otherwise. The people of Rome finding that in these perilous times they could but ill spare their wise governor, went in a body to Gregory, and begged him to accept the office of Bishop of their city, as his grandfather Felix had done before him.

You may be certain that Gregory would much rather have lived and died in his quiet retreat, but he was an unselfish man, and cared far more for the public good than for his own ease and comfort; so he listened favourably to their request, and was consecrated Bishop of Rome about the year 560. If we really have a desire and longing to do good to others, God will be sure to give us the opportunity. Had Gregory been a selfish man, and preferred his own ease to a life of active usefulness, I am sure he would have been a far less happy and contented man; and you will see how God made him a blessing to others as well as to himself.

I shall now tell you how much we, as Englishmen, owe to this good and wise man. Before Gregory became bishop he was one day walking in the market-place at Rome, and cast his eye of pity upon some poor youths who were there ex-

posed for sale,—for the buying and selling of captives was one of the evils which war and oppression had introduced,—Gregory, who had long been accustomed to the black hair and dark eyes of his countrymen, gazed with admiration on the large blue eyes, long flaxen hair, and fair complexions of these boys: “From whence come these poor youths?” he asked. When told they were natives of our island, and that the people were heathen, he exclaimed: “Alas! that such bright noble faces should be under the power of the prince of darkness.” When further told they were called “Angles” (from the Angles and Saxons who had conquered Britain), he added: “They were surely *angels* in face, and ought to share with the angels the joys of heaven.” These were no mere empty words of Gregory’s. It is easy to talk, but do we always act? As soon as he became Bishop of Rome, Gregory’s whole heart was thrown into the work he had so long hoped to be able to accomplish, and we shall see how God helped him to find a good man able and willing to assist him in carrying true religion to the benighted Saxons. If I make this chapter longer, I fear you will forget what I have tried to teach you in it. So I will reserve for another what I have to say about the conversion of the Saxons.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW AUGUSTINE LANDED IN KENT. HOW HE SUCCEEDED IN CONVERTING ETHELBERT THE KING, AND A GREAT MANY OF HIS SUBJECTS.—GREGORY'S WISE ADVICE.—CHARACTER OF ST. AUGUSTINE.

[A.D. 596—597.] GREGORY chose a monk named Augustine for the work he had in hand, and sent him with forty other good men to carry God's truth to the shores of England. He had himself started on the mission, but urged by his people to return, he once more set aside his own wishes for their good, and went back again to Rome. On their way to England Augustine and his monks stopped for a time in France, and they there heard such dismal accounts of the ferocity and obstinacy of the Saxons, that they returned to Gregory, hoping he would allow them to give up what seemed to them so hopeless an enterprize. But Gregory remained firm, and bidding them "God speed," once more dismissed them on their undertaking. Augustine and his little band of followers landed on the shores of Kent in the year 596.

If you have followed me carefully up to this point in our history, you will remember that God had partly prepared the way for Augustine by having already caused the Britons to believe in him: and although the ancient British Church was almost destroyed, still we must not imagine

that the true faith of the Britons had been of no use at all to the Saxons, as some in these days would fain make us believe.

Although we owe a deep debt of gratitude both to Gregory and Augustine, still we must bear in mind that doubtless the example of the conquered people, as well as other things, proved a great assistance to Augustine in spreading the truth.

The Saxons had now been masters of Britain for 150 years, and I have already told you that the country had been divided into seven different kingdoms. It so happened that Ethelbert, the King of Kent, that part of England where Augustine had landed, had married a Christian princess named Bertha, daughter of a French king. Up to this time she had been unable to persuade her husband to worship the God she served, but had so far succeeded by her gentleness and amiability in inclining the king towards Christianity, that he was disposed to protect rather than to destroy it. Ethelbert had gone so far as to allow his Queen to rebuild an old Roman church near the town of Canterbury, where the priest Luidhard, who had accompanied Bertha to England, regularly performed the service. So that when Augustine presented himself before Ethelbert, the King expressed his willingness to listen to what he had to say. Augustine and his monks walked in solemn procession to the place of meeting, chanting the Litany

as they went. To judge from the account given by an old Saxon writer^h, Augustine's sermon must have been full of truth and eloquence. Following the example of the apostles, he dwelt with fervour on the love and mercy of Christ to sinners, and how by His death on the cross He opened the gates of heaven to all that believe on and love Him. The King appears to have been much impressed, and exclaimed, "These are surely fair words and good promises that you have brought, but, forasmuch as they are new and unknown, we may not yet agree to forsake the ways which we with all the Angles have so long holden; but as ye come from a foreign land, and wish to make known to us the things ye believe to be good and true, we will not distress you. We will rather give you friendly entertainment, and supply you with what you want, neither do we forbid you to convert by your preaching whomsoever you may." Kind, charitable, words these, to fall from heathen lips; well may they put to shame many a Christian in after ages! The King offered Augustine and his monks a house at Canterbury, where they might preach the truth to any who were willing to listen, while Queen Bertha gladly gave them the use of her church for their religious services.

From all accounts Ethelbert seems to have been a very reasonable sort of man; he refused

^h Bede, Ecclesiastical History, p. 36.

to embrace Christianity at once, because he had had but little opportunity of judging whether it was really much better than his own religion for the people; but when he found Augustine and his companions tried to act up to what they preached, by leading holy lives, he became convinced of its superiority over his own rude faith, and believed with all his heart.

In those times, when none but the clergy and learned men could read, and very few people were able to judge for themselves, the example and wishes of the sovereign had great weight. Though we cannot but rejoice at the account of ten thousand persons being baptized after the King's example, we dare not believe that they were all equally as sincere as their sovereign. But let us hope that although some may afterwards have returned to their old religion, those who remained firm to the new faith, really believed from their hearts, and not merely because Ethelbert wished it.

By the advice of Gregory, Augustine was now consecrated first Archbishop of the English Church at Canterbury; and after all his labour and signal success, I think he well deserved the honour. At the same time Gregory gave him some very sound advice with respect to his behaviour towards the converted Saxons, and the old British bishops and clergy, who you remember had taken refuge in Wales and Cornwall, and founded Churches

there. Gregory had preserved a good many of the fine old prayers used in the Christian Church from the very earliest times ; these he placed together in a book, that they might be used the more conveniently when wanted. It is interesting to remember that a great many of these very prayers find a place in our own Prayer-book at the present day, and have been used in our churches by thousands of devout worshippers, ever since the time Augustine knelt and offered them up in the old cathedral at Canterbury.

Though Gregory shewed his wisdom in this respect, he was far too charitable a man to compel every one to act entirely on his system. On the contrary, he told Augustine not to keep too strictly to one rule, but to suit the service as far as possible to the different characters among whom he might be thrown, and to collect all he could that was good from the different Churches. "Choose," he says, "from every Church whatever is pious, religious, and well-ordered, and when you have made a bundle of good rules, leave them for your best legacy to the English." It would have been well had Augustine followed Gregory's advice, and given up a few of his own opinions for the sake of peace.

In reading about good men, I think, as a general rule, we shall find it more pleasing and more useful to dwell chiefly on their noble qualities, and try to imitate them. Still, for the sake of truth, we

are bound to open our eyes to their faults, and may be we shall learn something useful here as well ; always remembering that as we cannot live the life they did, or place ourselves just in their position, we are bound, in common honesty, to deal very tenderly and charitably with their failings.

You will have already seen in Augustine's character lofty piety, holy earnestness, and strong energy ; but we shall see that his piety degenerated at times to superstition, his earnestness to hot temper, and his energy to self-will. Pride was Augustine's besetting sin ; but then had he not a great deal more to encourage pride and haughtiness than many of us have ?

Perhaps even the good and charitable Gregory was too prone to believe in wonders and miracles ; still even this was better than denying altogether God's overruling providence, as many do in these days. Had we lived in Gregory's time, and been surrounded by fierce heathen enemies, and yet still survived in the midst of blood and desolation, we might have imagined we saw angels in bodily form, standing near to guard us. In my next chapter I shall tell you how the British bishops felt towards Augustine, and in what way they received him.

CHAPTER IX.

MEETING OF AUGUSTINE WITH THE BRITISH BISHOPS.—

HIS PROUD BEHAVIOUR AND DEFEAT.—GREGORY MAKES AUGUSTINE FIRST ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.—CHARACTER OF GREGORY.—HIS PIETY AND WISDOM.

[A.D. 597—601.] AFTER all I have said about Gregory's gentleness and wisdom, you will not be surprised that Augustine should have felt great love and respect for such a patron; and it was quite natural that he should have been anxious to make others feel as he did, and acknowledge the great and lasting benefit Gregory had conferred on England; but I do not think Augustine went quite the right way to gain his end. Zeal, carried too far, often makes men rash and inconsiderate; and although I feel sure Gregory would have approved of much that Augustine did, his gentleness must have been offended at the manner in which it was done.

Augustine had all his lifetime been accustomed to the way in which the service was performed at Rome, and he was now, for the sake of unity, most anxious that the British bishops should agree to use the same prayers and follow the same rules as Gregory had ordered at Rome. That matters might be amicably arranged, the British bishops and many of their cleverest men agreed to meet Augustine at a place on the banks of the river Severn, and talk the matter over. There is a

story told¹, that on their way to the place of meeting they stopped, and consulted a wise hermit, famed for his piety, in what manner they should behave. "If," said he, "Augustine is a man of God, believe and follow what he advises." "But how shall we find this out?" enquired the Britons. "Remember the words of our Lord," said the hermit, "'Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.' If," continued he, "Augustine is meek and lowly, believe that he is a true follower of Christ; but if he is ungentle and high-minded, it shews that he is no true follower of the Lord." "But how shall we find to which he inclines?" asked a bishop. "Let him and his company come first to the place of meeting, and when he is seated, then draw near yourselves: if he pays you respect by rising, then believe he is God's servant, and do as he commands; but if he remain seated, ye have the greater number on your side, so reject his advice." As there is a considerable degree of hot temper displayed in the hermit's last words, we may, I think, conclude that there were faults on both sides. Perhaps if each party had arrived at the meeting in a truly Christian frame of mind, determined to bear and forbear, the result might have been very different.

On their arriving at the spot, Augustine remained seated, and as you may suppose, the Bri-

¹ Bede, p. 70.

tish bishops were in no mood to accept his three propositions, however good they may have been. "If," they exclaimed, "he treats us thus haughtily now, what have we to expect, if we submit ourselves, and allow him to be our Primate?"

First, Augustine wished them to keep Easter Sunday on the same day as the Romans did, urging that the greater part of the Christian world, as well as the Church of Rome, observed it on this particular day; and, as he justly said, it seemed a pity their religious rejoicings should not all be celebrated at the same time. It may have been a pity, but it is more a matter of regret that Augustine should have tried to compel the British bishops to give up their old custom, and conform in a matter that was comparatively of so little moment.

Secondly, Augustine made a great point of their adopting exactly the same mode of baptizing as Gregory had ordered at Rome, although that wise man had justly said, "While the faith of the Church is one, there is no harm in a little difference of custom." Augustine either forgot or disregarded this good maxim.

His last request, which was far more reasonable, was unfortunately rejected with the rest. It was that the Britons should join with him and his monks in preaching God's Word to the Saxons.

The bishops refused to listen to Augustine's advice, and to own him as their archbishop, and

Dunod, the Abbot of Bangor, concluded the unfortunate meeting with the following memorable words: "We are bound to serve the Church of God and the Bishop of Rome, and every godly Christian, so far as helping them in offices of love and charity; this service we are ready to pay, but more than this I do not know to be due to him or any other. We have a Primate of our own, who is to oversee us under God, and to keep us in the way of spiritual life." Poor Augustine! he had longed fervently for union and peace, yet he turned from that stormy meeting sick at heart with disappointment, but, let us hope, a wiser and a better man.

As I have before said, Augustine was a proud man. Had he thought less of himself and been more humble-minded, one cannot help hoping that the British Bishops would have been far more willing to listen to his proposals, which really had a good deal of sense and reason in them; and as he possessed superior ability and many sterling qualities, I have but little doubt he would in time have gained that respect which he now so arrogantly demanded. You see, dear children, that one bad fault may hide and spoil all our other good qualities, and how careful we should be to try and find out what our besetting sin is, and endeavour by God's help to overcome it, that our holy deeds may not be hindered, and their good effects lost to others.

In the year 601 Gregory (to whom Augustine sent a faithful report of all that had taken place since his landing) sent over three good men to help in the work; one of whom was Paulinus, who afterwards became first Archbishop of York. They brought with them some valuable manuscripts, or written books,—among others a copy of the Bible in two volumes, the Psalms as they were then sung in the churches, and a book of the lives of the Apostles and martyrs. Gregory now formally appointed Augustine Archbishop of Canterbury, that is, head bishop over all the other bishops and clergy of England; and you must try and remember that he was the first Archbishop of Canterbury ever consecrated.

I must not forget to mention that one great benefit the Saxons derived from Christianity was a collection of very good and wise laws, put forth by King Ethelbert, and written by some clever men in their own language. These were the first written laws the English ever had, and were afterwards placed by good King Alfred with other laws he made for his people.

As Gregory is so closely connected with the history of Christianity in our own country, I think I cannot do better than close this chapter with a short extract or two from his works. Gregory was a man of deep and sincere piety. He was famous for his charity towards the poor, and his hatred of the slave trade; he also en-

couraged education, and greatly improved the style of Church music. Some of the finest old chants we sing in our churches now are founded on those composed by him. But Gregory's chief delight was the study of God's Word, and both by his example and advice he tried to make others set a like value on it. In a letter to one of the Emperor's physicians he reproves him for neglecting to read some portions of the Bible daily. The physician had excused himself by saying that he could find no time for this duty. "What else are the Holy Scriptures," writes Gregory, "but a letter from the Almighty God to His creatures? Truly, if you were staying at a distance from the Court, and received a letter from the earthly Emperor, you would not rest, you could not sleep, till you knew its contents. The King of Heaven, the Lord of men and of angels has sent you His letter, giving you directions how to gain eternal life, and yet you neglect to read this letter carefully. Bestir yourself, therefore, and reflect daily on the words of your Creator; learn to know the heart of God from the words of God, in order that you may long after Him, and your soul may glow with more intense desire after heavenly joys." And in another place he says: "Often we believe that we do something that is very praiseworthy, but when we return to the Word of God, we see at how great a distance we stand from perfection."

And that you may believe what I have said about the gentle and charitable nature of Gregory's Christianity, read the following words addressed to a bishop of the time: "We must seek to lead those who are far from Christianity by gentleness and mildness, by preaching, and conversation in the faith, in order that those who cannot be drawn to the faith by the gentle power of preaching may not be repelled by threatenings and terror." How would the loving heart of this truly Christian man have been pained, could he have foreseen how little in after ages the bishops of Rome, that sat in his place, followed the Christian spirit breathed in these noble words.

CHAPTER X.

GREGORY'S HUMILITY.—HOW THE BISHOPS OF ROME IN AFTER AGES BEGAN TO CLAIM UNDUE POWER.—ORIGIN OF THE TITLE "POPE."—HOW THE POPES TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE IGNORANCE OF THE PEOPLE TO TEACH DOCTRINES CONTRARY TO THE BIBLE.—DEATH OF AUGUSTINE.—HOW PAULINUS BECAME FIRST ARCHBISHOP OF YORK.—HIS WISDOM WITH REGARD TO THE CONVERSION OF THE HEATHEN KING EDWIN.

[A.D. 601—625.] I AM sure you will have seen from what I have told you about Gregory, that his only desire with regard to the people of England, was that they should be brought

to love God, and serve Him in the best possible way ; and although he sent Augustine good rules for managing the Church he had founded, and gladly gave him the benefit of his advice, he had no idea of ruling the bishops and people like a king, nor did he expect them to regard him as their head and adviser : on the contrary, I think you will agree with me that he had shewn himself humble throughout, and, you remember, had cautioned Augustine against pride and love of power. I fear we shall soon find other bishops of Rome acting in a very different spirit.

Before I proceed with this little history, I must give you a short account of the way in which they began to interfere in matters with which they had no business. I hope you have not forgotten what I told you, in my second chapter, about the wisdom of the Apostles in choosing good men to govern the different Churches they had founded. These bishops were only allowed control over their own people ; they had nothing whatever to do with Christians in other places, nor had they the slightest power over other bishops. In the early Church they all held the same rank, and had the same sort of duties to perform ; and although some, by their superior talents and holiness, gained respect from other bishops, and were often specially consulted at the councils, we never hear of their claiming power and authority to make laws for other churches. Disregarding this

wise and ancient arrangement, the bishops of Rome afterwards tried to persuade the people that they were greater and of more importance than all the other bishops, and so styled themselves alone, and required others to call them "Popes," a word which means "Father in God," and which in the early Church was sometimes given to those bishops who by their peculiar wisdom and holiness had gained the respect of the Church. When you get older, and can read larger histories, you will be able to learn much that is interesting about the first great council held at Nicaea, under the Emperor Constantine. No less than 318 bishops assembled there from all parts of Europe, to decide a matter of great importance. Many of these bishops had suffered sad tortures and hardships rather than give up their belief in Christ, and some were greatly beloved for their holiness and wisdom. The Bishop of Rome alone was absent on account of his great age; but as the matter does not seem in any way to have been referred to him to decide, we cannot suppose that he claimed any special power or authority. It is a curious fact, too, that the Bishop of Alexandria was styled "Pope" at this council; and as the Church of Alexandria was much esteemed, the bishops seem to have been honoured with this title, although they never thought of claiming it for themselves.

You have already read of the great power and

wealth of the emperors of Rome, and how Rome itself was for a long time the chief centre of learning and wisdom. When this great empire was destroyed, people still flocked to Rome to learn foreign languages and useful arts, and we can well understand how the bishops, taking the place of the old emperors, presumed on the ignorance of the people, and compelled them not only to respect, but in time to honour and obey them, even before the bishops of their own country. Now all this was quite contrary to the meek spirit which Christ recommends in the Bible. Several times, you remember, He reproved His disciples for disputing as to who should be chief among them, telling them that "he who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven must humble himself as a little child^k"; and in another place He exclaims, "Be not ye called Rabbi (or master), for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren^l." We do not find that the Apostles ever forgot their Lord's warning, but after His ascension they all worked together as equals in preaching His Word. This fact the popes afterwards tried to ignore, and, contrary to what we are told in the Bible, they wished to make people believe that St. Peter (whom they declared was the first bishop of Rome), was chief over all the other Apostles, and that therefore they who sat in

^k Matt. xviii. 4.

^l Ibid. xxii. 8.

his place were entitled to rank as he did, above all the other bishops.

Although the common people in those days could not read and find out for themselves what was really right, it was a long time before the bishops of Rome actually made them believe what they said, and submit ; but by slow degrees, by little and little, they gained their point, and when once they persuaded people to own them as the popes, or head fathers of the whole Church, their power became unbounded, and the rules they made, however wicked, and contrary to the Bible, were to be received and held sacred. English people had always loved liberty, and wise laws, and have a strong sense of what is true and just ; so you may imagine they did not submit very easily to the power of these foreign bishops. The same spirit which made the Abbot Dunod refuse even to listen to Gregory's advice, animated many of the kings and clergy who came after him.

The English Church became for a time the slave of the pope of Rome ; but thanks be to God she has now recovered her freedom, and stands forth as of old a noble Church, "built upon the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the head corner-stone."

When you have read larger histories of this struggle, and seen the wonderful way in which God has kept alive His true religion in England,

I am sure you will feel thankful that He has saved our own dear country from the darkness and ignorance into which so many other nations have fallen. But it remains for us to bear in mind this one useful lesson ; the more God gives us the more He will require from us, and while we have churches to go to, the Bible to read, and good people to teach us, He will expect us to profit by all these helps, and serve Him by leading holy lives.

Let us, then, beware of judging others, who have fewer opportunities given them, but let us do our best to discover our own faults, and set a high value on the blessings and privileges God has bestowed on us.

Augustine died in 604, after appointing Lawrence to fill his place as Archbishop of Canterbury. I shall not attempt to take you step by step through the stormy period of our history at which we have now arrived, but shall rather select from a mass of cruelty and wickedness, those characters which shine like bright lights in the darkness, and of which any age may justly be proud. Most of the Saxon kings were as yet ignorant of the true God, and as they still held to the cruel religion of Woden and Thor, they spent their time chiefly in carrying war and bloodshed into their neighbours' provinces ; but wherever Christianity made its way, there love and forbearance were almost sure to follow. Nearly one

hundred and fifty years passed before England became a Christian country ; we shall find that the conversion of the whole of the British isles except Cornwall, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, was chiefly owing to the labours of Augustine and his followers ; although we must remember that many of the British Christians forgot the former quarrel with Augustine, and as we shall see by and by, joined with the Roman Christians in spreading the good news of Christianity among the Saxons.

I shall now tell you a little more about Paulinus, who, you remember, was one of the three good men Gregory sent over to help Augustine. Sometime after Ethelbert's death, his daughter, who was a Christian, consented to become the wife of Edwin (the king of that part of England called Northumbria) on condition that the King, who was a heathen, would allow her to worship the true God. Edwin consented, and further promised that "if his wise councillors found her religion to be more pleasing to God than his own" he would himself adopt it, and receive her bishops or priests. Paulinus went with the Princess Ethelburga as her chaplain, or private priest, and was afterwards consecrated first Archbishop of York, by Justus, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Now Paulinus was an earnest and a wise man ; he did not, like Augustine, allow his zeal for God's truth to get the better of his judgment,

but wisely waited until he found a fit opportunity for teaching what he believed to be true. In the meantime, he did his best to induce the Queen's friends and servants to lead holy lives, and forgive any who had offended them, in order that the heathen king and his subjects might be able to judge for themselves as to the merits of the true religion. But, as I have told you a good deal in this chapter I wish you particularly to remember, I will keep for my next what I have to say further about Edwin and Paulinus.



CHAPTER XI.

HOW EDWIN CONSENTED TO LISTEN TO PAULINUS.—MEETING OF THE NOBLES AND PRIESTS.—CONVERSION OF THE KING AND HIS PEOPLE TO CHRISTIANITY.—EDWIN'S BAPTISM AT YORK.—PAULINUS'S CONTINUED SUCCESS.—HIS PERSONAL APPEARANCE.—DEATH AND CHARACTER OF EDWIN.

[A.D. 625—633.] A CIRCUMSTANCE happened which greatly assisted the good Bishop in gaining his point. You will see that God did not leave him to work alone, but helped him by opening a door for the truth to enter.

One day, as Edwin was sitting at table, a messenger came from the King of Wessex, pretending he had something of importance to say. While Edwin was listening to him, he suddenly drew

a dagger, aimed at the King, and would have killed him on the spot had not a faithful attendant thrown himself in front of the assassin, and received the dagger in his own heart. A desperate struggle ensued, in which another of the attendants lost his life; but at length the murderer was overpowered, and Edwin was saved. The very same night the Queen gave birth to a daughter, and while the King thanked his false gods for her deliverance and his own, Paulinus offered up his praises to the true God, and ventured to tell the King it was the Almighty alone, and not his false gods, who had preserved him and his Queen in the hour of danger. Edwin listened with patience, and was so far moved by the words of Paulinus, that he promised that if he could succeed in conquering the false King of Wessex, he would give up his idolatry and worship the true God; he also allowed Paulinus to baptize his little daughter, and at the same time eleven of the King's household were baptized with her. This was indeed a bright ray of hope for Paulinus; and we shall see how, in time, through his energy and wisdom, the King and his subjects declared themselves Christians.

Edwin's attack on the King of Wessex proved successful, and on his return from the victory he never again offered sacrifice to idols; but, like Ethelbert, he wavered, and considered a long time before he consented to be baptized. Many were

the conversations he had with the good Bishop, and often, we are told by a writer of the time, "did he retire alone to think on the awful subject." Boniface, who was then Pope of Rome, was told by Paulinus the history of Edwin, and the present state of his mind. The Pope, full of anxiety for his conversion, wrote letters both to the King and Queen, urging Edwin to give up his false gods and to "worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." With these letters he sent some presents as proofs of his goodwill ; for the King, a soldier's shirt-of-proof or hawberk, ornamented with gold, and a camp-cloak of fine cloth ; and for the Queen, an ivory comb set in gold, and a mirror of polished silver. Still Edwin could not yet make up his mind to own his belief in the true God, until one day Paulinus boldly entered his presence, and reminding him of the events of his former life, when God had saved him from his enemies, exclaimed, "By God's grace thou hast escaped thine enemies, and through His bounty thou art now in possession of the kingdom thou didst long for ; remember now the promise thou didst make God, that He who hath raised thee to a short-lived earthly kingdom, and put down thy earthly foes, may deliver thee from eternal misery, and give thee a part of His eternal kingdom in Heaven." Struck by the earnest manner and fervent words of this good man, Edwin hastened to call together his lords

and wise people, that they might give their opinion on the new faith. Bede, a famous writer of the time, gives us an interesting account of this meeting. First, the chief heathen priest speaks : “ It is your part,” said he to the King, “ to find out what this new doctrine is ; but I, for my part, will needs speak as I think. The faith we have all hitherto held is good for nothing. Among all thy people there is none who has given himself more diligently to the worship of the gods than I, and yet many have received greater benefits and prospered more than I have. If these gods had been worth anything, they would have helped one who has so faithfully served them. If, therefore, after due examination, thou hast perceived that these new things of which we have been told are better, let us at once hasten to adopt them.” Then one of the nobles rose, and spoke words well worthy of one who had been brought up as a Christian : “ O King, man’s present life in this world when compared with another that is unknown, is just like a sparrow flying through the hall in winter time, when you, your chiefs, and servants are seated at supper, the hearth blazing in the centre, the meats smoking and hot, while all without is storm, hail, and snow. The bird flies through, coming in at one door, and going out at the other ; the little minute he is within he does not feel the cold air, but after that he returns again to winter, as from winter he came,

and is seen no more. Such is the life of man ; and of what follows it, or of what has gone before, 'we are quite ignorant : therefore if this new religion should tell us anything more certain, it well deserves to be followed.' The rest of the nobles seemed to agree with these words ; but that they might understand more fully the new faith, they asked Paulinus to explain it to them. We may be sure his sermon was plain and earnest, for when he had ended, Coife, the high-priest, who had first spoken, proposed that they should at once give proof of their conversion by destroying the heathen temples ; and he who had before honoured these temples and worshipped in them was the first to set the example. Coife, mounted on the King's own war-horse, and armed with a spear and sword, rushed to the sacred spot. We can well imagine the astonishment of the heathen natives, when, contrary to all their laws, they beheld their chief priest mounted and armed ; but still greater was their surprise when Coife hurled his spear at the wall of the temple, and urged his followers on to burn and destroy it ^m.

King Edwin was baptized at York on Easter Day in the year 627, in a small church built of

^m There is a village in Yorkshire built on what is supposed to have been the very spot where this sacred temple stood. It is called "Godmundham," and the meaning of this name will remind you, if ever you go there, of the wild Saxon priest and his zeal in destroying idolatry — 'The home protected by the gods.'

wood. If ever you happen to visit York, you must not forget, when you see the fine old minster or cathedral that has taken the place of this simple little church, to think of King Edwin, and the good and wise Archbishop Paulinus. Now that Edwin had proved the truth of the new religion, and seen how much better and happier it made men than the old faith did, he was most anxious that others should be brought to worship God, and know Him as well; so he moved his court from place to place in order that Paulinus, who went everywhere with him, should preach to different villages all over his kingdom. This plan answered so well, that numbers flocked to listen to the Archbishop, and Bede tells us that for thirty-six days he was fully employed from morning till evening baptizing the people he had converted to the true faith.

It may interest you to read the description given by Bede of this remarkable man's appearance, particularly as it was given to him by an abbot whose friend had been baptized by the Archbishop himself. "Paulinus," he says, "was tall of stature, a little stooping, his hair black, his face thin, his nose slender and aquiline, but his whole aspect venerable and majestic^a."

The good King Edwin not only tried to bring over his own subjects to the truth, but was the means of converting a neighbouring king; besides which he is said to have built several

^a Bede, p. 100.

churches. Now that you see how sincere Edwin was in his belief, and how much he tried to act up to what Paulinus taught, you will, I know, agree with me that the first Archbishop of York behaved very wisely in giving the King time to consider before he decided on becoming a Christian; for you know, dear children, a mere outward profession of faith is worth nothing. We must believe from our hearts, or we can never expect to act rightly. That you may see the difference between the cruel religion of the Saxons and the gentle, peaceable nature of the Christian faith, I will just quote a few words from a famous writer of olden times: "At that time," he says, "there was no public robber, no domestic thief, the plunderer of other men's goods was far distant; surely a state of things redounding to the praise of King Edwin, and worthy, too, of praise in our day: indeed such was the increase of his power that justice and peace willingly met and kissed each other^o."

Edwin fell in battle, fighting like a brave man, in the year 633. The same writer thus speaks with admiration of his prudence and sincerity: "He was inferior to none in prudence, for he would not embrace even the Christian faith till he had examined it most carefully; but when once adopted, he thought nothing was worthy to be compared with it."

• William of Malmesbury, p. 45.

CHAPTER XII.

DEATH OF PAULINUS, AND HEATHEN STATE OF THE COUNTRY.—HOW THE GOOD SCOTTISH MONK AIDAN CAME AND TAUGHT THE PEOPLE.—HOW HE BECAME BISHOP OF LINDISFARNE, AND GAINED THE RESPECT OF ALL RANKS.—PIETY OF KING OSWALD.—REASONS WHY THE SCOTTISH PRIESTS SUCCEEDED SO WELL IN CONVERTING THE HEATHEN.

[A.D. 633—643.] THE fierce heathen kings who had attacked Edwin, and killed him in battle, desolated the whole country, sparing neither women nor children in their fury. Paulinus, anxious to preserve the widowed Queen Ethelburga and her children from danger, escaped with her into Kent, guarded by a trusty band of Christian soldiers. He never again returned to York; but having been kindly received by the King of Kent, who was a Christian, he afterwards became Bishop of Rochester, and died at a good old age, much beloved and respected.

Edwin left no child to succeed him on the throne; one son had fallen by his side in battle, the other had been taken prisoner, his remaining children having escaped with their mother into Kent. After a good deal of fighting and bloodshed, the next king we find reigning in Northumbria after Edwin, is Oswald. He was the younger son of the king who reigned before Edwin, and

as he was a wise Christian prince, it was a fortunate thing for the country when he came to the throne. No king is more honoured by the writers of his time than Oswald. We are told that before the last great battle, which delivered the country from the heathen kings, he placed the Christian's ensign, a cross, in front of his soldiers, and, devoutly kneeling, prayed for deliverance and victory. "This sign of the holy rood," he said, "is our token of blessing; at this rood let us bow, not to the tree, but to the Almighty Lord that hung upon the rood for us, and pray Him to defend the right." Oswald's prayer was heard; he gained the victory, and the throne became his.

You remember that I told you, in my last chapter, that in course of time the British clergy came forth from their retreats in Wales and Scotland, and greatly helped the Roman Christians in spreading God's truth. It so happened, that during his troubles Oswald and some of his nobles had taken refuge among the Scottish princes, and there had learnt to know the true God and to worship Him. They received baptism from the disciples of the good Columba, who, you remember, had settled in the little island of Iona, and founded a monastery there. As soon as he became king, Oswald sent to ask these Scottish princes to send him some good man to teach his people the Christian faith, which had been sadly forgotten during the late wars. After some consideration, their

choice fell upon a monk named Aidan, who, King Alfred tells us, was full of zeal and the love of God. At first they had chosen a monk for the work who returned out of heart, and full of complaints against the fierce untamed natives. "You seem to me," said Aidan, "to have been too hard with these unlearned men; remember the Apostle Paul's practice, feed them with the milk of gentler doctrine till they are prepared for that which is more perfect." Aidan's wise remark so pleased the Scottish council, that they at once determined on sending him to Oswald. In a short time the King made him Bishop of Lindisfarne, which is the first notice we have of the see of Durham, as it is now called. Aidan was a monk of Iona, and soon after his departure several other monks and priests joined him in the good work, and became much loved and respected for their holy lives and earnest preaching. That you may form some idea of the character of this good bishop, I cannot do better than quote the words of Bede, who most likely talked with him, or at all events must have seen the good effects produced by his earnestness. "He was one who seemed neither to covet nor to love any of this world's goods, and all the gifts he received from princes or rich men he distributed to the poor. Wherever he went, whether to town or village, he journeyed on foot, never riding on horseback unless some urgent need required it. He asked all the rich and poor he met whether

they were Christians : if they were not, he invited them to learn the faith ; if they were, he sought by discourse to strengthen their faith, and by words and deeds to encourage them in works of mercy. Those who journeyed with him, whether clergy or others, were seen employed, either in reading the Scriptures, or in learning how to sing psalms, that is, when they were not employed in holy prayers. If ever he was invited to the King's table, he went with one or two of his priests, and when he had eaten, he soon rose, and took his leave, to return to read and pray. To the rich and powerful he gave his reproofs without fear or favour, offering them no present, but entertaining them with hospitable cheer, when they visited him in his house. He spent a good deal of the money given him in buying off those who had been unjustly sold for slaves, and many of those whom he had thus redeemed he afterwards converted to the faith, and when they had been well taught he promoted them to the sacred order of the priesthood ^{p.}"

When Aidan first came into Northumbria he knew nothing of the Saxon language ; but King Oswald, who had learnt to speak Scotch during his banishment in that country, used to interpret the words while Aidan preached to his earls and thanes. "It was a fair sight," says Bede, "to see a Christian king so employed, and a striking

^p Bede, quoted by Churton, p. 62.

instance of the care of Providence, turning the misfortunes of his youth to a means of blessing." Like Edwin, this good king fell in battle, but the religion he had loved and valued so much during his life, sustained and comforted him as he lay covered with wounds on the bloody field. His last prayer breathed the spirit of Christian love : " Spare, Lord, the souls of my people."

I think, dear children, if you have followed me carefully up to this point in our history, you will have found out what was the great secret of the success of these early Christian preachers. The noble example they set, and the simple holy lives they lived, proved, under God, the chief means whereby so many were brought to give up a faith which generally produced such different results. The preaching of Columba, of Augustine, of Paulinus, and of Aidan, would have been all in vain, and their zeal of little use, if they had not taken pains to act up to what they taught. Augustine's sermon seemed to have but little effect on the mind of King Ethelbert; he still hesitated to declare himself a Christian; but when he saw how different was the conduct of these monks to the heathen that surrounded them, he and his nobles were convinced, and believed with all their heart that Augustine had spoken the truth. And does not all this teach us a useful lesson ? God gives us all power in our small way, young as well as old, to make others better and happier.

by our example. A boy who loves the truth, who scorns to injure any child, or any creature weaker than himself; who refuses to return an angry blow, and yet bravely fights like a champion for those who cannot protect themselves; such a boy will shame the liar into speaking the truth, and make the coward brave; and though his words may be forgotten or unheeded, his example will live in the hearts of others long after he has passed away.

About fifty-five years after the landing of Augustine, the whole of England seems to have become Christian, except the county of Sussex. Is it not singular that the county of Kent should have been the first to give up the worship of idols, and yet that Sussex, which you know stands next to Kent in the map, was the last in all England to receive the truth? The remarkable progress of Christianity made during the last part of this time, is mainly owing to the labours of the good British monks from Columba's monastery; and I am sure it was a happy thing for England, when God put it into Oswald's heart to send to the Scottish princes for a good bishop. Do you not think so?

CHAPTER XIII.

VENERABLE BEDE.—HIS USEFUL LIFE AND HAPPY DEATH.

—ACCOUNT OF THE SAXON MONASTERIES,—AND HOW THEY WERE A BENEFIT TO THE COUNTRY.—INDUSTRY OF THE MONKS.—ABUSE OF THE MONASTERIES.

[A.D. 671—735.] BEFORE I proceed with our history, I must give you a short account of the good writer Bede, whose words I have several times quoted; there is much to admire in his character, and a good deal to be learnt from him. What a treasure his history of the times is to us, the first history of the Church in England ever written—written, too, at a time when the events recorded were still taking place. Up to this period, the only way in which people could learn anything about past history, was by hearing old people talk about what had happened in their time, and what had been told them by their parents and grand-parents before them; so, by this means, the history of past events was handed down by word of mouth from father to son; but as you may suppose, this was a very uncertain way of learning the real truth. Bede's history, which is still preserved to us, is therefore of great value, more particularly as he was able to see a great many choice and learned books, which had been brought from Rome, and placed in the library of the monastery. Bede, or Venerable

Bede, (as he is generally called out of respect,) was born in Northumberland, about the year 671. Being an orphan he was entrusted to the care of his uncle, the Abbot of Biscop, to be brought up. He shewed his love for religion at a very early age, and, as he grew up, he still remained in his uncle's monastery, spending the whole of his time in studying his Bible, writing good and useful books, or singing in the Church. "I found it," he says, "delightful either to learn, to teach, or to write." His chief work was an explanation of the books of Scripture, a great part of which was taken from the works of the early Christian writers, or "Fathers," as they are generally called, with a good deal of his own added. This work, which he continued with great patience, took him twenty years to finish. But while he was teaching so many people by his writings, he never forgot his other duties, but spent a good deal of his time helping the young men of the monastery in their studies, and by his advice and example encouraged them to take pleasure in reading good and useful books. At the time of his last illness he was busy translating the Gospel of St. John into the Saxon language, chiefly for the use of his pupils; "for," said he, "I do not wish my boys to be employed after my death in reading what will do them no good." We may be sure the boys loved and respected so kind a teacher, and though they must

have grieved very much when he was taken from them, still we may hope that many of them tried to imitate him as they grew up, by improving themselves and being of use to others.

I shall now give you a short account of this good man's last hours, because I think it is a comfort to us to remember that the same glorious faith we believe in now, cheered and sustained this holy Christian on his deathbed many hundred years ago. Venerable Bede was sixty-three years old when he was seized with his last mortal disease; it was about a fortnight before Easter, in the year 735: but he lingered on till the eve of Ascension Day, encouraging and cheering those who wept around his bedside, by his fervent prayers and holy advice. He quoted several of his favourite passages of Scripture to them, and told them, while they lived, often to dwell on the time when they would breathe no more, and remember how little that was really good they had done during their lifetime. Then he recited the fine old Saxon hymn, beginning—

“Ere the pilgrim soul go forth
To its journey far and lone,
Who is he that yet on earth
All his needful part hath done?”

Then, addressing his boys, he said, “Learn, my children, while I am with you, for I know not how long I shall continue: but I have lived long:

God hath rightly appointed my portion of days ; I desire to go, and to be with Christ. I have not," he said, "passed my life among you in such a manner as to be ashamed to live, neither do I fear to die, for we have a kind Master." On Tuesday before Ascension Day, he called all his friends around him, and gave to each some little present, as a token of his love ; he then called to mind that there still remained one sentence of his translation of St. John's Gospel unfinished. The youth who had been writing the words, as he dictated them, in the morning approached his bedside, and at Bede's request set down the few remaining sentences. "Now it is finished," said the boy, closing the book. "You say well," said Bede, "*it is* finished : let me rest my head on thy hands, that though I can no longer kneel, I may still look towards the holy place where I used to pray and call upon my Father." Then, with his dying lips, he repeated the fine old prayer on which our collect for the Sunday after Ascension Day is founded, "O King of Glory, Lord of Virtue, who didst ascend this day triumphant into the heavens, leave us not destitute, and send upon us the promise of the Father, the Spirit of Truth." As he breathed the last words, his gentle spirit passed away to its home of peace above. When you say "Amen" to this ancient prayer, bear in mind that it was uttered by one of the best and wisest of our countrymen on his

deathbed, and that it has been used in our Church prayers more than a thousand years; indeed, ever since the time that Gregory the Great gave it to Augustine to use in the English churches, together with a great many others which still find a place in our Prayer-book.

Should you ever be fortunate enough to go to Jarrow, the place where the Venerable Bede lived and died, you may see the very chair he used while at his studies; a rough old oaken seat certainly, but what a valuable relic of the past! His bones were afterwards placed by King Stephen in the cathedral at Durham, where a plain stone with these few simple words inscribed on it, marks this good Christian's dwelling-place:—

“Here rest the bones of the Venerable Bede.”

You will see, from all I have told you, that the monks in the Saxon monasteries led neither idle nor useless lives. Some of their best and wisest men worked very hard. They encouraged and preserved during troublous times much that was very valuable, and gave the ignorant people round them a great deal of good and useful information. Bede did not spend the whole of his life in study, but we are told he travelled abroad, “for the object of bringing home to his countrymen something useful, and out of the common way.” He was the first to introduce stone for building houses and churches, instead of wood, which the Saxons

had hitherto used, and which is not of course nearly so strong and lasting. Bede also taught his countrymen to make glass windows, like the Romans.

Before I conclude this chapter, I am sure you would like to hear how the monks in the Saxon monasteries passed their time. Though many of them were nobles, and people of high rank, they were not too proud to work hard, like servants, and took pleasure in doing all sorts of useful things, such as milking cows, working at the mill, or in the garden, or kitchen; we even read of an abbot working like a common blacksmith at the forge, and ploughing and sowing like a labourer. All these useful things they taught the poor, who of course could find no excuse for being idle while the clergy worked so hard. Then monasteries were often built where the ground was damp and unhealthy, and the soil so poor that no one had cared to plant or cultivate it; but we are told that no sooner were the monks established in their new abode than "the marshes were drained, the woods cleared, and the waste land improved and cultivated⁴."

As I have already told you, some of the monks employed their time in teaching little children; there were no large schools in England then, as there are now, and these monasteries were the only places where children could learn to read,

⁴ Southey's Book of the Church.

or be taught their duty to God and to their fellow-creatures. Then the monks went a long distance to preach, and read the Bible to the people in the villages round ; and as it was a very rare thing for a person to be able to read for himself, you may imagine how ignorant people would have been about the Bible and the Christian faith, unless the monks had been clever men and willing to impart their knowledge to others. I told you that in the ancient British monasteries many of the younger monks spent the whole of their time in making copies of the Scriptures, in order that in seasons of warfare and trouble, the Word of God might still be preserved to the people. The Saxon monks also employed themselves zealously in this good work ; they were not content with merely writing out the words in a plain neat way, but took the greatest pains to paint many of the letters in gold and bright colours ; and after the books were finished, they were handsomely bound in velvet and precious stones. Some of these beautiful books or manuscripts, as they are generally called, are fortunately preserved to us, and when you go to the British Museum in London, or to the Library at Oxford, you can have the pleasure of looking at these fine old relics of our past history ; but remember with gratitude that it is mainly owing to the patience and labour of these good men that God's Word has been handed down to us from age to age

Some of the best-bound Bibles and Prayer-books you see in our shops now are copied from the designs of these monks, and many people are fond of painting texts in gold and coloured letters like those done many centuries back in the English monasteries.

Now that I have been telling you of all the good done by these monasteries, you will be the more sorry to hear that harm should have been done by them also; but in this world we must never expect to find things or people wholly without fault; and it is only fair that in judging any matter we should view both sides of the question. In course of time almost every one thought it his duty to retire to these places of seclusion, thinking God would be better pleased by their becoming monks, than if they continued to perform the daily work He had given them to do in their family. Consequently, you can well understand that many useful and necessary duties became neglected. Again, people of rank and wealth spent a vast deal of their money in building monasteries; and although we must admire the readiness with which they parted with their riches in God's service, we cannot but regret that they further thought it necessary to retire to the monasteries they had built, instead of spending their energies and time in the public office they held. The good and wise Bede saw the evil of all this: he thus speaks in one of

his last letters: "We have had a long time of peace and calm, and now many of our people, themselves and their bairns, gentle and simple, are more bent upon going into minsters, and taking the shaven crown, than upon going to the camp exercise; what the end of this will be, another age will shew."

But, in conclusion, when you hear monasteries spoken of as places of mere idleness and superstition, then remember all the good and useful things the monks did, and how God raised them up for His own wise purposes. And on the other side, when you are told that a life of retirement from active duty is more pleasing to God than any other, then bear in mind that we each have our work given us by God, and we have no right to neglect those home duties He has appointed us, for other occupations of our own seeking.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW THEODORE BECAME ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.—COUNCIL OF WHITBY.—RETIREMENT OF THE SCOTTISH BISHOP COLMAN AND HIS MONKS FROM ENGLAND.—THEIR PIOUS AND CONSISTENT LIVES.—WISDOM OF THEODORE.—BISHOP WILFRID OF YORK.—HOW CHAD BECAME BISHOP IN HIS PLACE, BUT AFTERWARDS RESIGNED.—WILFRID'S ACTIVITY AND ZEAL.—HIS WEALTH AND MAGNIFICENCE.—OPENING AND CONSECRATION OF RIPON CATHEDRAL.

[A.D. 643—670.] We must now go back to the time when the good King Oswald fell in battle. His brother Oswy reigned after him. This king, we are told, having done something very wrong in his early youth, was most anxious to shew his penitence by supporting the Christian religion, which alone held out to him hopes of God's forgiveness⁴. It so happened that at this time there was no archbishop, either of Canterbury or York. Oswy wishing to have the vacant See of Canterbury occupied, sent to request the Pope of Rome to send him some holy man suited for the post. Like the wise Gregory, this Pope gladly promised to do his best to help the Saxons. The man on whom his choice fell was an Abbot named Adrian, famed for his knowledge of the Bible, and respected for his holy life.

⁴ William of Malmesbury.

This good man humbly declined the high office, but recommended a monk named Theodore, who happened then to be at Rome. And to shew that he had not declined the archbishopric merely from a love of ease and quiet, Adrian agreed to go with Theodore to England and help him in his work. Theodore proved well worthy of the honour, and although he was sixty-six years of age when he was appointed Archbishop, he left his own polished home in Italy without a murmur, and spent the few remaining years of his life, toiling hard for the good of a strange, half-savage people. Surely it is to such men as this that our Lord's words of blessing especially apply: "Verily I say unto you, there is no man who hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."^{*} It so happened that just before the arrival of Theodore in England, Oswy had called together a number of clergy, with Colman, the Scottish Bishop of Lindisfarne at their head, to try and settle the troublesome question about the time of keeping Easter, which still remained undecided. Oswy's queen, who was the daughter of the good King Edwin, had been taught by the Roman clergy, who attended her, to keep Easter Day at quite a different time to her hus-

* St. Luke xviii. 29, 30.

band and his Scottish priests; which caused, as you may suppose, a good deal of confusion and inconvenience. Oswy, who seems justly to have held the followers of St. Columba in great respect, was most anxious that they should agree to settle the matter peaceably with the followers of St. Augustine and Paulinus. Possibly it would have been better, had he let the matter rest quietly for a time, and waited for the arrival of the gentle and wise Archbishop Theodore. As it happened, the Council, which was held in the old abbey of Whitby, ended much in the same manner as the famous meeting of St. Augustine with the British bishops; nothing was settled after all, and what was worse, the good Bishop Colman, together with all his earnest clergy, took offence at the King's deciding in favour of Wilfrid, a young monk who spoke on the side of Rome, and soon afterwards resigned his bishopric, retiring with his whole party of monks to a monastery in Ireland. It was a sad loss to the English when these hardworking Christians left the country; they had gained great influence over the people by their holy teaching and self-denying lives; and though they refused to obey, as the Roman bishops did, any foreign bishop or Pope, they cheerfully submitted to the authority of their own Bishop.

As I shall have nothing further to tell you about the Scottish monks, perhaps you would like

to hear what Bede said of them, and then you will understand how it was people were so willing to listen to their teaching. "Very few houses," he says, "besides the church, were found at their departure; they had no money but cattle, and if they received any money from rich persons, they immediately gave it to the poor; there being no need to gather money or provide houses for the entertainment of the great men of the world, for such never went to the church except to pray and hear the Word of God. The King himself only came with five or six servants, and having performed his devotions in the Church, departed. If they happened to take any food there, they were satisfied with only the plain daily food of the brethren; for the whole care of these teachers was to serve God, not the world, to feed the soul, not the belly. So for this reason," continues Bede, "the religious habit was at that time in great veneration, so that wherever any clergyman or monk happened to come, he was joyfully received by all persons, as God's servant; and if they chanced to meet him upon the way they ran to him, and bowing were glad to be signed by his hand, or blessed with his mouth. Great attention was also paid to their exhortations, and on Sundays they flocked eagerly to the church, or the monasteries, not to feed their bodies, but to hear the Word of God; and if any priest happened to come into a village, the

people flocked together to hear from him the Word of Life, for the priests went into the village on no other account than to preach, baptize, visit the sick, and, in few words, to take care of souls. They were so free from worldly avarice, that none of them received lands or possessions for building monasteries unless compelled to do so by the authorities."

Theodore, the new Archbishop, was a wise and charitable man, and one cannot help hoping that had the Scottish Bishop and his monks remained at their posts, the two different parties might have become good friends, and joined in teaching the people; particularly as we afterwards find the Scottish Church, in the year 710, agreeing to keep Easter at the same time as the English Church. So at last this troublesome matter was settled. Theodore by his wise conduct soon gained the confidence and respect of all parties, and the people willingly received him for their Archbishop. He was a learned as well as a good man, and many of the rules he laid down proved of great benefit to the English Church. Among other things, he encouraged rich people to spend their money in building churches all over the country, and in providing good clergymen to preach in them; for up to this time, you remember, most of the monks lived together by themselves in monasteries, without any settled system, just as they had done when Christianity

was first established in England. Theodore also ordered, that as soon as fresh provinces became Christianized, new bishops should be appointed to govern them, that the monks and people should be properly attended to, and religion kept alive in the land. Theodore, being a clever man himself, felt the value of being well taught, and founded several good schools; the chief of these was the monastery of St. Augustine at Canterbury, of which the wise Adrian was made Abbot.

I must now tell you about another famous man who lived at this time. You remember Wilfrid, the monk who had taken the side of the Roman Christians at the council of Whitby? Shortly afterwards he was made Bishop of York^a, but as he refused to be consecrated, or set apart for his work, by any of the Scottish bishops, he went over to the French bishops for that purpose. King Oswy, offended at Wilfrid's want of respect for the Scottish bishops, appointed during his absence another bishop named Chad, who had before been a Saxon abbot, and a pupil of the good Scotch bishop Aidan. Chad proved well worthy of his excellent master, leading the most simple life, and walking about to preach to and instruct his people in the villages, allowing himself no more ease and comfort than the poorest monk in his diocese. Wilfrid after his consecra-

^a After the death of Paulinus, York became for a time only a *bishop's See*. Hook's Lives of the Archbishops, vol. i. p. 157.

tion in France returned to England, but you will be glad to hear, that instead of feeling angry at Chad taking his place as Bishop of York, he retired into Kent, and employed himself in preaching, and ordaining clergy there. It so happened, however, that Theodore seems to have doubted whether Chad had any real right to the bishopric. "If," said this humble Christian to Theodore, "you have any doubt about it, I willingly resign the office, which I always felt unworthy to hold, and did but consent to take it out of obedience to my King."

Although Theodore seems to have been unwilling to urge the good Chad to resign, the latter wisely determined to do so, feeling that peace and good-will were of far more value than his own worldly advancement. Wilfrid now became Bishop of York, but Theodore, struck with the humble and upright character of the good Chad, became the means of his appointment to the See of Lichfield. The fine old cathedral at Lichfield is named after this good man, but has been greatly altered and improved since his time. Wilfrid's mode of living was a complete contrast to that of the plain, hardworking Chad. Proud, haughty, and full of grand notions, he seems to have inspired his people with awe rather than with love, spending a large amount of money in outward show—for the bishops in those days had a great deal of wealth at their disposal.

Although Wilfrid thought too much of his own power, you will be glad to hear that he was not altogether idle, nor did he spend all his money in pomp and show; he often travelled about the country, followed by his monks, and a party of builders and stone-masons, the latter of whom he employed in restoring old churches and building new ones, whenever he could prevail on the noblemen and gentry to give him land. The monks at the same time taught the people to chant in church, and sing psalms. I dare say you have heard of the cathedral of Ripon. It was founded by Wilfrid, and was very strongly built of stone, like the churches he had seen in Italy. From what we read of this church, it seems to have been a square, rather ugly building, with marble pillars, but it was the best that could be built in those days, and was regarded by the Saxons as very magnificent. The opening and consecration of Ripon Cathedral must have been a very grand ceremony; several Saxon princes and a great many nobles and others assembled. The Bishop preached a sermon urging the people to come forward and give their money freely to build more churches; he himself presented a splendid copy of the Four Gospels to the cathedral, the letters of which were painted in gold and brilliant colours, and the book bound in velvet, set with precious stones. I have already told you how willingly the people came forward to offer

their money for the building of churches and monasteries. Unfortunately Wilfrid, not content with receiving their offerings for these good purposes, accepted a great many presents himself; and although he must have read in his Bible that “they who will be rich fall into temptation, and a snare,” he seems to have forgotten or paid no heed to this warning. So we shall find that God wisely deprived him of the idol that was luring him away from his duty, and by sending trial and adversity instead of riches and ease, made the proud Bishop repent his selfishness. In the next chapter you will see how God chose him to be the instrument of spreading the blessings of Christianity into a part of England that still remained in heathen ignorance.

CHAPTER XV.

**HOW WILFRID BY THE ADVICE OF THEODORE IS BANISHED
THE COUNTRY.—HOW THE POPE INTERFERED, BUT WITH-
OUT SUCCESS.—WILFRID RETIRES TO SUSSEX.—HIS ZEAL
IN CONVERTING THE NATIVES—FOUNDATION OF THE
MONASTERY OF SELSEY.—WILFRID RETURNS TO YORK.
—HIS DEATH AND CHARACTER.**

[A.D. 670—709.] WILFRID's wealth and power had by this time increased to such an extent, that King Egfrid, who was reigning in that part of England in place of his father Oswy, became

alarmed, and summoned Archbishop Theodore to consult him in the matter. He proposed that Wilfrid's large diocese should be divided into two parts; but to this the Bishop indignantly refused to submit, and Egfrid, enraged at this obstinacy, took Theodore's advice and banished Wilfrid from the country. Doubtless the Bishop felt very unhappy at being driven away thus suddenly from his comfortable home, and deprived of all his honours; but he lived to find that God had ordered the trial for his good and for the benefit of others.

Wilfrid of York was one of those characters who shine best in adversity: his high spirit and dauntless energy carried him nobly through his difficulty; and instead of wasting time in idly mourning over the past, he set to work in earnest to make up for his past folly. You remember I told you the county of Sussex was the last in all England to give up the old heathen worship. I dare say this was partly owing to the Downs with which it is surrounded; and at the time of which I am speaking the land was marshy and covered with thick wood; besides which, the sea, we are told, quite encompassed some parts of it, and so shut it out from the rest of England. Wilfrid of York was the man chosen by God to bring the pagan people of this wild region to the true faith; and well he performed his work. Wilfrid had before crossed over to Rome, and

having persuaded the Pope to take up his cause, returned in triumph to England with some letters in his favour, which the Pope sealed with the image of St. Peter and St. Paul. These letters so sealed were called "Bulls," and this is the first Pope's "Bull" we ever read of as being sent to a king of England. Egfrid, seeing no reason why the Bishop of Rome should interfere in the matter, as he had not consulted him, treated the "bull" with the greatest contempt, and sent Wilfrid to prison as a rebel. The King's aunt, a good woman, afterwards obtained his release; but the power of Egfrid was such that Wilfrid could find no safe retreat among the Christian provinces of England, and at last took refuge in the heathen county of Sussex. It so happened that the King of this county had already received baptism, but the greater number of his subjects were still worshipping idols, and although a good Scottish monk had founded a small monastery at a place near the sea called Bosham, "none of the natives," says Bede, "cared to follow their course of life or hear their preaching." Bishop Wilfrid, however, was by no means daunted, and wisely tried to gain the respect and love of the people before he attempted to teach them about the true God. When Wilfrid first set foot in Sussex, no rain had fallen for so long, that the poor natives were suffering dreadfully from famine. A great many destroyed themselves rather than endure a lingering death.

Wilfrid led them to believe in the true God, by first shewing them how to make use of the good things He had bestowed. The sea and rivers abounded with good fish, but the people were unable to catch them, owing to their want of skill. The Bishop and his men, having collected all the nets they could find, cast them into the sea, and caught on the spot three hundred fish, which they divided among the starving people. "By this benefit," writes Bede, "the Bishop gained the affections of them all, and they now readily listened to his preaching, hoping that as he had shewn them how to get worldly food, he would teach them the way to get heavenly food also." The King of Sussex gave Wilfrid and his followers some land at a place called Selsey, a dreary flat spot enough, almost surrounded by the sea, but soon to become the centre of a new and living faith. On this dismal spot Wilfrid founded a monastery, and on the day that he publicly baptized a great number of the people, we are told a soft plentiful rain fell, the parched earth revived, and the trees and grass recovered their bright fresh colour. No wonder the good monks regarded this as a token that God was blessing their labour of love; in those simple times every event of life was regarded as specially coming from God's hand, and although this pious feeling was sometimes carried too far, we should do well in these days to take a lesson

from our Christian forefathers, and instead of thinking so highly of our own power and cleverness, give all the praise to Him who directs the small as well as the most important events of life.

On the death of King Egfrid, Wilfrid once more returned to York, after ten years of banishment. The good Archbishop Theodore died soon afterwards. You will be glad to hear that he and Wilfrid became good friends at last, and their old quarrel was quite forgotten. Theodore was of a peaceable, gentle character; his chief desire was to make his people agree among themselves, as he himself could not bear to live at enmity with any one. It would have been well had Wilfrid tried to imitate the Archbishop in this respect, but his haughty and overbearing temper seriously hindered his efforts to do good. When he got his own way again, and became rich and powerful, his quarrelsome temper would not allow him to live at peace with the other bishops, and he was again driven from his bishopric, which, however, he afterwards regained. He died in the year 709, and his remains were carried to his own monastery at Ripon, where a long epitaph was placed on his tomb, mentioning all the good deeds he had performed. Wilfrid's zeal, energy, and devotion to the English Church, were certainly well worthy of praise; but had he been less fond of show and more

careful to control his temper, I cannot help thinking he would have had more influence over the people; and like the good Columba, Aidan, and Chad, would have gained respect for his teaching by the simplicity of his life. Nevertheless the good he wrought among the heathen people of Sussex, ought always to be remembered by us with gratitude.

CHAPTER XVI.

HOW THE SAXONS TAUGHT MANY OF THE HEATHEN IN OTHER COUNTRIES.—ACCOUNT OF BONIFACE.—HIS ZEAL AND ENERGY.—THE GREAT DIFFICULTIES HE AND HIS MONKS ENCOUNTERED AMONG THE WILD PEOPLE OF GERMANY.—HIS MARTYRDOM IN THE CAUSE.—HIS PIOUS CHARACTER AND DEVOTION.

[A.D. 715—755.] You know, dear children, when God bestows wealth and riches on us, He expects us to use a part of it for the benefit of those who have none; and the same rule must be observed with other gifts. “Freely ye have received, freely give,” are words which apply as well to spiritual blessings as to worldly riches. If we have found comfort from God’s truth ourselves, it should make us the more anxious to teach others, who are still in ignorance of the love and mercy of their heavenly Father.

You have already seen how much we English

people owe to those good men, who in spite of every difficulty crossed the seas, landed on a foreign shore, and laboured diligently to impart to the heathen Saxons those religious blessings which God had bestowed on *them*. You will be glad to hear that when the Christian Church was fully established in this island, many of those who had embraced the true faith were not content to enjoy in selfish ease the blessings they had received, but longed to obey their Lord's command, and to "teach and baptize other nations," fulfilling the golden rule "to do unto others as they had been done by."

I cannot tell you of all the good men who in those early times became missionaries or teachers of the heathen, but I will give you a short account of one or two, because I think every English child ought to know something of their history, that they may try and imitate their courage and perseverance. About the year 715, a monk named Winfred, a native of Crediton in Devonshire, excited by the example of other earnest men, determined to teach the wild people of Germany the blessed faith of the Gospel. Winfred had been brought up in the monastery of Exeter, and had become famous for his earnest preaching and for his activity in the cause of Christ. Before he set out on his difficult undertaking, he went to Rome and was consecrated by the Pope Missionary Bishop of the Germans,

under the new name of "Boniface." It so happened that a zealous English priest named Wilbrood (who had been brought up in Wilfrid's monastery at Ripon) had crossed over into Germany forty-six years before, and had founded several Christian churches on the banks of the river Rhine, so that Boniface was able to join this aged Christian in the good work of converting the natives. Wilbrood soon afterwards died, and then Boniface took his place. Being a bishop, he was able to ordain a great many other clergymen to help in the work; numbers joined him from England, and Christianity continued to spread rapidly among the heathen people, although the good missionaries were surrounded by every possible difficulty and danger. Many of them, like St. Boniface himself, ended a life of hardship and poverty by martyrdom, and like the early Christians we read of, gave up their lives rather than forsake the truth they preached. To give you some notion of the extreme peril and difficulty these good men went through in performing their work, I must tell you that the greater part of Germany in those early days was covered with dense forests, so thick that daylight could scarcely penetrate through the trees, and wherever living beings appeared, their cruel and savage aspect was calculated to strike terror into the bravest heart. They looked indeed almost as ferocious as the beasts they hunted

for their food. One of the good priests ordained by Boniface begged to be sent with only two companions into the midst of these gloomy and unknown regions, intending if possible to build a church, and to persuade the barbarians to worship in it. "Go," said Boniface, "in the name of God, for the Lord is able to provide His people a home in the desert." St. Boniface may have believed many strange stories, and persuaded the heathen to believe them too; without doubt also he shewed too much reverence for the Pope, and obeyed his commands too strictly; but for all this we must admire the noble faith these words display. When we see these humble-minded Christians carrying out in action all that they believed and taught, can we wonder that even the savage hearts of the German heathen were tamed, and that they were at last compelled to bow before the courage and holiness of these dauntless missionaries? A writer of the present day tells us that the brave monk and his two companions went into the thick forest, and for three days they saw nought but earth and sky and mighty trees, but they went on praying that Christ would guide their feet into the way of peace. On the third day they came to a dreary spot, which they searched round, and prayed that Christ would bless the place for them to dwell in; and then they built themselves little huts of beech bark, and abode there many days, serving

God with holy fastings, and watchings, and prayers. Then the good monk returned to Boniface to tell him all that had been done, and then once more set out on his perilous undertaking, but this time alone. "He took however a trusty ass and as much food as he could pack on it, and, axe in hand, rode away into the wild wood, singing his psalms." Every night before he lay down to sleep "he cut boughs and stuck them up for a fence round him and the ass, to keep off the hungry wolves." Numbers of times was the life of this brave man in danger; "for the heathen Saxons were the cruelest of all tribes, and the gentlest death the missionaries could expect at their hands was to be knocked on the head before some hideous idol." But God rewarded their patience and faith, and soon a monastery was raised on a spot wild enough, it is true, but which the pious monk I have told you of, afterwards declared to Boniface "was prepared for them of the Lord." For he says, "When I saw it I was filled with immense joy, and went on exulting, for I felt that by the prayers of the holy Bishop Boniface that place had been revealed to me, and the more I looked at it, the more I gave God thanks."

Supported by their bishop, the monks began clearing out the thick trees, and when the abbey was built, these good men "worked hard at carpentering, farming, gardening, writing, doctc

ing, teaching in the schools, and preaching to the heathen round," till numbers of the natives were taught to lead useful and industrious lives, and to believe in a God of love and peace. Truly, we must exclaim with the writer I have quoted, "God made these good monks, and had need of them^t."

Boniface, after leading a life of active usefulness and enduring great hardships for the cause he preached, received a martyr's crown, and at his last request his remains were carried to the monastery of Fulda, the history of which I have just been telling you, and which he had always loved to visit and superintend. As I hope you have been interested in reading something about the life of this good missionary, perhaps you would like to hear what a German writer says of his death: "At the age of seventy, full of vigour and energy, he started on a tour through his diocese, preaching, converting, and baptizing thousands, destroying the temples of idols, and founding churches. A number of persons he had baptized were all to have assembled on a certain day to receive confirmation; the morning dawned and Boniface waited with anxiety the arrival of the new converts. He heard the sound of an approaching multitude, but it was an armed host of furious pagans, who had sworn to murder on that day the enemy of their gods. The Christian

^t Rev. C. Kingsley. Article in "Good Words."

youths who surrounded Boniface wished to fight for him, and were on the point of beginning the conflict, when the Bishop, followed by his clergy, begged them to desist, saying, ‘Put down your swords, for the Holy Scriptures teach us not to return evil with evil, but with good. I have for a long time earnestly desired this day, and the time of my departure is now come; be strong in the Lord, and bear with thankful resignation whatever His grace sends; hope in Him and He will save your souls.’ The words were scarcely uttered when the good old man was dragged away, and a violent death put an end to his long life of pious activity in God’s cause.”

Though Boniface left his own country to live among strangers he never forgot his old home, nor ceased to feel a lively interest in the welfare of the English Church. He often wrote to his friends in England, and his letters are full of good advice, and breathe a spirit of fervent love for God’s Word. “Throw aside everything that hinders you,” he writes to a young Englishman, “and direct your whole study to the Holy Scriptures, and there seek the divine wisdom, which is more precious than gold; for what is more seemly for youth to strive after, or what can age possess more valuable, than the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, which will guide our souls without being shipwrecked in the storm, to the shores of

* Neander’s Memorials of the Early Christian Life, p. 469.

the heavenly Paradise, to the eternal heavenly joys of angels?"

In his old age, Boniface wrote to request his friend the Bishop of Winchester to send him a manuscript of the Prophets, which he had left behind, and which was written in very distinct letters. "If God incline you to grant this request," he writes, "you can render no greater comfort to my old age, for in this country I am unable to obtain such a manuscript of the Prophets as I wish for, and with my weak eyesight I cannot read closely-written characters." When we see what value these early Christians set on the Word of God, and what trouble and pains they took to obtain even one copy of it, and that only written with a pen, how thankful ought we to feel to God that in these days Bibles are so plentiful, that even the youngest child or the poorest person can buy a clearly printed copy of the sacred volume. Surely no one in these days can excuse himself for doing what is wrong by saying he is ignorant of God's will and commandments.

CHAPTER . XVII.

ALCUIN OF YORK.—HOW HE BECAME CHIEF ADVISER OF THE EMPEROR CHARLEMAGNE, AND DID A GREAT MANY GOOD AND USEFUL THINGS.—HOW ALCUIN AND THE ENGLISH BISHOPS CONDEMN THE POPE'S NEW DOCTRINE, THAT IMAGES OF SAINTS SHOULD BE PLACED IN THE CHURCHES.—COUNCIL OF FRANKFORT.—ALCUIN'S LOVE FOR THE BIBLE.—STATE OF ENGLAND AT THIS PERIOD.—PETER'S PENCE.—SERVICE IN THE SAXON CHURCHES.—HOW THE CHURCHES WERE BUILT.

[A.D. 735—794.] Now that we are talking about the good the Saxons did in other countries, I must not forget to mention the name of a very learned and excellent man who flourished about this time, and of whom Englishmen may justly feel proud. Alcuin of York was born about the year of Bede's death, 735, and was a pupil of Adrian, the learned man who you remember accompanied the Archbishop to England. Alcuin soon became famous for his singular ability and for the holiness of his life. It so happened that while travelling in Italy he met the celebrated French Emperor Charlemagne, then the richest and most powerful sovereign of Europe. France had been for a long time in a very unsettled state, and consequently religion and learning had been suffered sadly to decline. Charlemagne had the good sense to perceive Alcuin's merit, and begged him to settle in France. Alcuin, after obtain-

the consent of his Sovereign and the Archbishop, accepted the offer, and became tutor to the young princes of France, and the chief friend and adviser of the Emperor himself, who always treated him with the utmost respect. This good Englishman proved well worthy of the honours bestowed upon him, and employed his whole time in devising all sorts of useful things for the benefit of his adopted country. Copies of the Scripture and books of prayer were at this time extremely scarce in France. Alcuin set about correcting the copies that remained. He sent one to each of the principal monasteries and cathedrals, and the bishops ordered the monks there to write out more copies; so that after a time, the Word of God became distributed over a great part of Charlemagne's vast dominions. Alcuin also made a great many extracts from the "Fathers," or early Christian writers, considering that the sermons of these holy men were great helps to those who were studying the Bible. I must now mention one other very good thing that Alcuin did. You remember how I told you the Popes of Rome became very powerful after a time, and insisted on the different Churches obeying the rules they had laid down, however contrary they might be to Scripture, and to the early Christian faith. Adrian, who was Bishop of Rome at this time, called together a council, and decreed that images of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of other saints

should be placed in churches, that the people by kneeling down before them might be assisted in their worship of God. But although no actual worship of the image was intended, you may well imagine the ignorant and poor would soon begin to address their prayers to the images themselves, forgetting that God has said, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, to worship it."

It is a great satisfaction to know that all the English bishops, together with the wise and learned Alcuin, condemned this new doctrine with horror. Alcuin, who was then in England, wrote against this specious kind of idolatry, and the arguments he brought forward from Scripture and the Christian writers were so convincing and satisfactory, that Charlemagne determined to do all in his power to check the evil. He called together a council of three hundred bishops at Frankfort, who solemnly condemned the Pope's new doctrine. So you see Alcuin was the means of checking for a long time the growth of error in France and England.

Before we take leave of this truly good and useful Christian, I will just quote a passage from a letter he wrote to the Emperor Charlemagne, and sent with a copy of the whole Bible which he had himself carefully corrected. The passage is full of interest, as shewing the high value this learned man set on God's Word. "I have for a long time," he says, "been studying what pre-

sent I could offer you, not unworthy of the glory of your imperial power, and one which might add something to the riches of your royal treasures. I was unwilling that while others brought you all kinds of rich gifts, my poor wit should remain dull and idle, and that the messenger even of so humble a person as myself should appear before you with empty hands. I have at last found out, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a present which it befits my character to offer, and which it will not be unworthy of your wisdom to receive. Nothing can I offer more worthy of your great name, than the Book which I now send, the Divine Scriptures, all bound up in one volume, carefully corrected by mine own hand. It is the best gift which the devotion of mine heart to your service, and my zeal for the increase of your glory, has enabled me to find*."

As I fear in my next chapter we shall come to a sad and stormy period of our history, when religion and learning were again all but extinguished in England, I think we shall find it pleasant and instructive to dwell a little longer on this time of learning and peace, when so many good and clever men flourished.

At this period the English Church taught for the most part doctrines that were pure and Scriptural, and gained the respect of the heathen by the holy and consistent lives of her bishops and

* Churton, p. 175.

monks. The English clergy, too, did their utmost to oppose the tyranny of the Popes of Rome, who in after times struggled hard to force the English Church to submit to their rules, and obey their commands. Unfortunately, some of the Saxon kings rather encouraged than opposed the Popes in their claim, although I do not think they could have foreseen all the evils that would arise from such unwise conduct. About the year 716, a pious king of Wessex, named Ina, made a pilgrimage to Rome, and while there founded a school for the Saxon youths, where they could be sent over, and taught many things that could only be gained in that famous city of art and learning. Of course this school had to be supported, and for this purpose Ina demanded a tax of one penny from each of his subjects at home. It seemed only fair and right that they should pay something towards the education of their children ; but after a time this practice, though good in itself, gave the Popes of Rome an opportunity of interfering with the liberty of the English people. After a few years had elapsed they actually compelled our ancestors for several centuries to pay the tax, which was called Peter's Pence, because it was collected on St. Peter's day. The money so collected, instead of being applied to the support of the School, was given away to the poor at Rome, or used for lighting up the Church in honour of St. Peter. No wonder that the English people rebelled against

such an imposition as this, and that they frequently refused to pay the unjust tax altogether.

Before I conclude this chapter, I think it would interest you to hear what kind of service the Saxons had in their churches. Aldhelm, a good bishop of Sherborne who lived about the year 700, took great pains to make the worship of God hearty and attractive to the people. The first organ used in England was built under his direction. He also translated the Psalms of David into the Saxon language, and taught the people to sing them, that they might the better join in the service at church. Acca, Bishop of Hexham, followed in Aldhelm's footsteps. After building a handsome church at Hexham, he collected a valuable library of books, and being a good musician took great pains to have his choir taught to chant well in church. Unfortunately, the Roman Christians thought so much of Latin, that most of the prayers and hymns were offered up in that language, so that the greater part of the people were unable to join in the service themselves; but the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and some of the Psalms, seem to have been chanted in Saxon. Alfred tells us that the clergy of those days "were earnest both in preaching and learning," and that every Sunday and festival, each priest expounded the Gospel unto all committed to his charge. Our Saxon forefathers strictly observed the Lord's Day, as a day of rest to be specially

set apart for God's service. King Ina made a law against working on that day, and Sunday traffic of all kinds and journeying were forbidden. Up to this time those who could read were encouraged to study the Holy Scriptures for themselves, and if many of the people were ignorant of God's Word, it was solely from a scarcity of copies of the Bible, which being written with a pen, were of course very expensive to buy. The Saxons seem also to have taken great delight in reading the lives of saints and good men, and although we must regret that a great deal of false legend was mixed up with what was good and true, still the example of holy men doubtless stirred up many who read their lives to follow in their footsteps, and strive after what was good and noble.

Although in the early times of which we are speaking books were rare, happily those that the people possessed were calculated rather to improve than debase their minds; and if in these days we can boast of a vast number of good books that were unknown to our ancestors, we have at the same time a great many wicked and foolish newspapers and books which they were fortunate enough not to possess.

When the Saxons first conquered the Britons you remember they destroyed all the buildings they could find, and you may be sure that such churches as had been built shared the general

ruin. It is certain we have hardly any remains of old British or Roman churches^y.

The Saxons, when first converted to Christianity, used chiefly wood for their churches, so that they would not be likely to last long; and as these churches were almost all rebuilt at a later period, we have hardly any remains whatever of old Saxon buildings. We know, however, that at the end of the seventh century stone churches were introduced. Wilfrid alone built three, at York, Ripon, and Hexham, and Bede tells us of the building of stone churches at Wearmouth and Jarrow. But even these were partly rebuilt and much altered afterwards, so that it is very difficult to discover which part of the building really belongs to the Saxon period.

^y The ancient church of St. Martin near Canterbury, which King Ethelbert allowed St. Augustine to use for Christian worship, still stands, and although much altered since that time old Roman bricks may still be found in the walls.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RAVAGES OF THE DANES IN THE REIGN OF KING EGBERT.

—CHARACTER OF ETHELWULF.—HIS SON ALFRED ASCENDS THE THRONE.—MISERABLE STATE OF THE CLERGY AND PEOPLE.—STORY OF THE ESCAPE OF THE BISHOP OF LINDISFAENE AND HIS MONKS.—THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ABBEY OF CROYLAND.—MASSACRE OF THE ABBOT AND MONKS.—ALFRED'S CHARACTER.—HIS EFFORTS TO REVIVE LEARNING.—HIS ENERGY AND PIETY.

[A.D. 802—901.] We have now arrived at the time when all England became nominally united under one king, Egbert. The English Church had enjoyed a long period of peace and prosperity, but it pleased God, in His wisdom, to send upon His people a bitter storm of desolation and misery, that they might once more learn to distrust their own strength, and rely solely on the help of their Almighty Protector.

Egbert ascended the throne in the year 802, but no sooner was he firmly established in his kingdom, than he had to contend with a new and terrible enemy. You have often read in history of the dreadful havoc produced in our country from the invasion of the Danes, a savage piratical people, who landed in vast hordes, from Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Like the old Saxons, these Danes were heathen, and took delight in destroying and burning wherever they went, and

having learnt no useful nor peaceable arts, they merely cared to settle in England for the sake of plunder. When they had destroyed everything valuable in the neighbourhood of their settlement, they removed to another place, spreading misery and desolation on every side. Their gods, like those of the Saxons, were deities of war and evil, and accordingly, hating the Christian religion, the Danes destroyed every church and monastery they came near, murdering the monks and clergy or forcing them to flee. It is sad to think of the number of valuable manuscripts and relics lost to us at this time, and of the many fine old monasteries and churches which fell to rise no more. Egbert gained but few victories over the Danes. In 833 his army was totally routed, and the Bishops of Sherborne and Winchester, who were bravely fighting for their religion and country, fell in the bloody field, together with a large number of the nobles. Egbert died in the year 838, leaving the kingdom to his son Ethelwulf. This prince is chiefly famous as being the father of our celebrated King Alfred. According to an early writer, he was of "a heavy, sluggish, disposition"; and although urged by two of his bishops to exert himself in defending the country, he was so inactive that the Danes were successful in most of the battles. At the time when his presence was most needed at home, he started on a journey

• William of Malmesbury, p. 98.

to Rome, with his son Alfred. Although Ethelwulf took this journey from pious motives, I cannot help thinking he would have shewn more true religion in remaining at his post, and supporting his people in the hour of danger.

Ethelwulf, while at Rome, restored the school which Ina had built for the education of the Saxon youths, which had been destroyed by fire, and at the same time his young son Alfred was confirmed by Pope Leo, who undertook to be his godfather^a. In the meantime the Danes continued their ravages, and as they possessed plenty of ships, and the Saxons had none, they were enabled to land without difficulty on any part of the coast. They committed all sorts of cruelties, sparing neither old nor young, male nor female. Ethelwulf was succeeded by his three elder sons, who all reigned in turn. It was about this time that the Danes made a furious descent upon the North, where Christianity had so long flourished, and where the finest monasteries and churches had been built. You remember how in those days the monasteries were the only places where all that was most valuable could be preserved; and when they were destroyed, together with the good monks, the people had no means of learning about God, or hearing His Word; besides, what little they had already learnt was soon forgotten in this unsettled time of warfare and trouble. No

^a Asser.

wonder our wise King Alfred, when he came to the throne, sadly lamented the state of barbarism and ignorance into which his people had fallen. Many of the learned monks, together with their young pupils, had been either murdered by the Danes, or forced to quit the country; and those who had been newly ordained to supply their places, had enjoyed but little opportunity of studying for their sacred office. This will explain the reason why Alfred, at the time of his accession, declared that "the clergy were quite unable to translate the Latin language into their own tongue; nor could they even understand the ordinary prayers used in the worship of the Church."

In their descent upon the North, the Danes destroyed the fine old monasteries of Ripon, Hexham, Whitby, and Lindisfarne, whose histories I am sure you have been interested in hearing. These cruel pirates, not content with seizing everything valuable, and destroying all the useful and costly books, murdered the monks and wreaked their vengeance on defenceless women and children. But in this dark season of trial God did not forsake His Church, although for some wise purpose He allowed evil to triumph for a time. There is an interesting story told of the escape of the good Bishop of Lindisfarne, together with all his monks, and a large body of Christian people. On the approach of the savage Danes, Bishop Eardulph hastily commanded his monks

to take the bones of Cuthbert, a former bishop, together with the remains of Aidan and King Oswald; and collecting all the holy vessels and Church books, the little band of true believers started on their weary, perilous retreat over the Cheviot hills and across to the shores of Ireland. How sad they must have felt as they bade a last adieu to that home which was associated in their minds with all that was most venerable and sacred! Doubtless many were the longing looks they cast back on the fine old monastery and abbey, which had stood as a witness for God for more than two hundred years, and which must so soon fall a prey to the fire and sword of the heathen. After undergoing unheard-of difficulties, and several times but narrowly escaping from the hands of their enemies, they landed safely in Ireland. Before long, however, the Bishop became most anxious to return to his post (which he regretted ever having quitted), and if possible to collect his scattered flock. So the band of fugitives once more returned to England, and took refuge in a small monastery in the North, which from its secluded situation in a thick wood, had escaped the vengeance of the Danes. Here, for some years, the spark of true religion was kept alive, when all around was enveloped in thick darkness. There is also a very touching account given by Ingulph of the destruction of the fine old abbey of Croyland, not far from Peterborough. It was

midnight when the murderous Danes approached the sacred spot. The good Abbot Theodore and his monks had just risen to join in the vigil service. Theodore's first care on discovering the danger was to dismiss the younger monks with the valuables to a place of safety, and gathering round him the children and some old people who remained behind, he entered the church and calmly proceeded with the service. The faithful band of believers knew that death was certain, but determined to stand at their post till the last, like brave and true Christians as they were. Meantime the lurid light kindled by the Danish torches grew brighter and brighter, as they approached nearer; but all was silence in the monastery, and the fierce enemy was about to retire, when the distant sound of the midnight chaunting fell on their ears. They at once rushed to the church, burst open the sacred doors, and with one stroke of the axe cut down the good Abbot, who was kneeling in prayer at the altar; nor was the bloody work complete until all, both old and young, had shared the same fate as their beloved Superior. The fine old abbey was consumed in the flames, but the Christian martyrs still live to join their songs of praise with the angels in heaven.

At this period, the condition of the English Church was certainly most deplorable, but we shall see how God, true to His promise "that

He would be with His Church to the end of the world," raised up a deliverer, and once more revived the sinking hearts of the people. In the year 872, Alfred, by the death of his brother Ethelred, obtained the crown, which I believe the poorest man in England could hardly have coveted. We are told that "every place was filled with rapine and slaughter, and the King, after battling for nine years with the heathen Danes, found that all that remained to him of his kingdom were the three counties of Hampshire, Wiltshire, and Somersetshire^b." At first Alfred was wholly overwhelmed with the difficulties of his situation, and at the beginning of his reign took little or no interest in the affairs of his kingdom. After a time, however, he was roused to a sense of his duty by the persuasions of a good monk named St. Neot, and soon began in real earnest to bestir himself for the good of his people. Asser, Bishop of Sherborne and friend of Alfred, who wrote the King's life, tells us in a few forcible words, how God caused Alfred's troubles to work together for his good. "It pleased God," he writes, "to give this illustrious king the experience of both extremes of fortune; to suffer him to be hard pressed by enemies, to be afflicted by adversities, to be humbled by losing the respect of his friends, as well as to gain victories over his foes, and to find prosperity

^b William of Malmesbury, p. 113.

in the midst of reverses, that he might know that there is one Lord of all, to whom every knee shall bow, and in whose hands are the hearts of kings ; who putteth down the mighty from their seat and exalteth the humble, who willeth that His faithful ones in the height of success should sometimes feel the rod of adversity, that they may neither despair of His mercy when brought low, nor when exalted be proud of the honour they enjoy, but know to Whom they owe it all."

I shall not here take you step by step through all Alfred's difficulties in his contests with the Danes, and his final triumph over them, because you have already read all about this in your History of England ; but I think it will better suit our present subject to dwell on the character of this truly wise and good sovereign, and see how love for God and the Christian faith influenced all his actions. The writer I have already quoted tells us that "the private life of Alfred was to be admired and celebrated with the highest praise," and although the greater part of his reign was passed "amid the sound of trumpets and the din of war," he found time to make admirable laws both for the religious worship and the discipline of his people. When Alfred himself began to feel the value of learning, he became most anxious that his people should be taught all the good and useful things that had well-nigh been forgotten or lost in the late season of misery and

warfare. To this end he invited learned men of other countries to settle in England; he raised up new monasteries, repaired many of the ruined churches, and built new ones. The school at Oxford, which had been established by Archbishop Theodore, and had afterwards been allowed to fall into decay, was restored by him, and became the foundation of one of the grandest universities of the world. Alfred also built the church of St. Peter's at Oxford, and the cathedral of Winchester. Assisted by Bishop Asser, and by Plegmund, Archbishop of Canterbury, this good king translated a great part of the Bible into the Saxon language, together with Venerable Bede's History of the Church; indeed every moment of Alfred's time was employed usefully, and all the energies of his mind and body were spent in trying to repair the mischief done by the Pagans to his country and people. King Alfred had a great love for the Psalms of David, and at his death, which took place in the year 901, he was employed in translating them into Saxon. We are told "he always carried in his bosom a copy of the Psalms selected for each day, for the purpose of carefully reading them when he had any leisure." Alfred was also a true poet himself; he coveted not the world's praise and honour, but his sole desire was to elevate the minds of his people by his writings. The following beautiful

^c William of Malmesbury, p. 121.

lines were written by him, and they give us a true and just idea of his singular piety and talent. They are the closing stanzas of a hymn of praise to the Almighty, and have been turned into English verse by a writer of our own day :—

“ Forgive now, Ever Good ! and give to us,
 That in our minds we may up soar to Thee,
 Maker of all things ! through these troublous ways ;
 And from amidst these busy things of life,
 O tender Father ! Wielder of the world !
 Come unto Thee, and then thro' Thy good speed
 With the mind's eyes well opened, we may see
 The welling spring of Good, that Good, Thyself,
 O Lord, the King of Glory ! Then make whole
 The eyes of our understandings, so that we,
 Father of angels, fasten them on Thee !
 Drive away this thick mist which long while now
 Hath hung before our mind's eyes, heavy and dark ;
 Enlighten now these mind's eyes with Thy light,
 Master of life ! for Thou, O tender Father,
 Art very brightness of true light Thyself ;
 Thyself, Almighty Father ! the sure rest
 Of all Thy fast and true ones ; winningly
 Thou orderest it that we may see Thyself ;
 Thou art of all things origin and end ;
 O Lord of all men ! Father of angels ! Thou
 Easily bearest all things without toil ;
 Thou art Thyself the way and leader too,
 Of every one that lives, and the pure place
 That the way leads to : all men from this soil
 Throughout the breadth of being yearn to Thee^d ! ”

^d King Alfred's Poems, turned into English metre by Martin F. Tupper.

His energy is the more remarkable because during his whole life he suffered from a most painful complaint. Asser tells us, that "If through the mercy of God his disorder left him for a single hour, night or day, he was constantly filled with dread of its return." Alfred's piety must have been sincere, for his actions were as pure and good as his words, but we know even the best and wisest men have their faults, and we cannot help regretting that we should have allowed his people to believe and accept some new and false doctrines taught by the Pope of Rome. At this period, the placing of images in churches became more general, and people began to pay almost as much respect to the Blessed Virgin Mary as to our Saviour Jesus Christ. In after years these errors led to infinite evil, and prepared the way for still more false and unscriptural notions. Yet, for all this, Alfred's reign was a glorious one for the English Church and nation, and at this distant period of time we are still feeling the benefit of many of his wise laws. Like a true patriot, Alfred's chief desire was that the good he was enabled to do his people might not die with him. "I have," he says, "desired to live worthily while I lived, and after my death to leave to men that should come after me, a remembrance of good works." Truly the last wish of this Christian prince is accomplished, for as long as England exists, the name

of the good King Alfred must ever be held in veneration.

Before concluding this chapter, I will just quote the following admirable lines, which I have copied from an old Anglo-Saxon poem*. They are supposed to have been addressed by the dying Alfred to his son and successor Edward, and breathe a spirit of noble piety :—

“Thus quoth Alfred—‘ My dear son, come near,
Sit thou beside, and I will teach thee here.
I feel mine hour is well-nigh come, my son,
My face is white, my days are almost done;
Soon must we part, I to another throne,
And thou, in all my state, shall stand alone:
I pray thee—for mine own dear child thou art—
Lord of this people, play their father’s part;
Be thou the orphan’s sire, the widow’s friend;
Comfort the poor man, and the weak defend;
With all thy might
Succour the right,
And be strong against the wrong.
And thou, my son, by law thyself restrain,
So God shall be thy Guide, and glorious gain:
Call thou for help on Him in every need,
And He shall give thee greatly to succeed.’ ”

* King Alfred’s Poems, turned into English metre by Martin F. Tupper.

CHAPTER XIX.

EVIL INFLUENCE OF THE DANES.—TRIAL BY ORDEAL.—

WISDOM OF ARCHBISHOP PLEGMUND.—COMMENCEMENT OF THE DIVISION BETWEEN THE MONKS AND CLERGY.—LIFE OF ST. DUNSTAN.—HIS EDUCATION AND SINGULAR ABILITY.—HE IS ATTACKED WITH BRAIN-FEVER.—HOW HE ENTERED A FOREIGN MONASTERY, AND BECAME A STAUNCH UPHOLDER OF THE MONASTIC SYSTEM.—HE IS ENCOURAGED AND SUPPORTED BY ARCHBISHOP ODO.—CHARACTER OF ODO.—STORY OF KING EDWY AND HIS QUEEN.—DUNSTAN'S BITTERNESS AGAINST EDWY.—MELANCHOLY DEATH OF THE YOUNG KING AND QUEEN.

[A.D. 901—959.] THE harm the fierce Danes did to our country was not confined to the destruction of all that was good and useful in the monasteries; many of the clergy had been murdered, and none had been ordained to supply their places, and so the Saxons soon forgot the good things they had learnt from the lips of their teachers. Meanwhile the Danes, in those parts where they settled, taught the people many cruel and heathenish superstitions. Perhaps you have heard of the trial by ordeal, which became very general in England after the arrival of the Danes. When any person was accused of some crime of which he declared himself innocent, instead of judging him, as we do now, in a court of law, and taking great pains to find out from others whether

the accused was guilty or not, the Saxons and Danes ordered the person to carry red-hot irons about, or to do some other equally dangerous thing. If he remained unhurt, he was declared innocent, and escaped punishment : but you know God's laws cannot be altered ; the innocent as well the guilty must almost always suffer by grasping hot iron, or falling into deep water. So by this foolish law, you may imagine, many an innocent person was condemned, whilst the guilty escaped punishment.

The good Archbishop Plegmund, who assisted King Alfred in his studies, was a wise and diligent man. He created several new bishoprics, besides ordaining many fresh clergy to supply the places of those who had been murdered by the Danes. Indeed Plegmund seems to have done his utmost to keep alive true religion ; but he lived in sad, troublous times, during one of the darkest periods the English Church has ever gone through. But God, at this time as well as in every age, preserved His Church from utter ruin, and after some years we find many of the cruel Danes becoming Christians, for the Saxons compelled the Danes they conquered to renounce their heathen faith, and embrace Christianity. Although a mere outward profession of faith, such as this, would have been of no value in God's sight if the heart remained hardened, still we may hope that many believed sincerely, when they saw the supe-

riority of the Christian faith over their own barbarous and cruel religion.

At this time an important discussion arose in the English Church : the question was whether it was advisable to rebuild the monasteries, or to erect instead more parish churches over the country. Instead of the clergy living together in bodies in the monasteries, some people thought it would be better for the country if they all married and lived at their separate villages, as you know they do in these days. You must bear in mind that the state of society at the time of which I am speaking was very different to what it is now ; the people had no means of getting useful knowledge for themselves, as they can do in these days, and the country was so often desolated by warfare, that you cannot be surprised that many even of the best men thought religion and learning could never exist unless the clergy strengthened themselves by banding together in large, strong buildings. A good deal of this was very true, but it is sad to think with what animosity the subject was discussed, and how for years the two parties struggled for the mastery¹. At this juncture a remarkable character appears in our

¹ The clergy who lived as monks in the monasteries were called "regulars;" those who preached in the parish churches, and lived at their own houses, were called "seculars;" but as simple words are the best, we will distinguish the rival parties by calling the regulars monks, and the seculars clergy.

history. Dunstan, or St. Dunstan, as he is sometimes called, was a staunch friend and upholder of the monasteries, and while he lived and for years afterwards, the monastic order, as they are called, entirely triumphed over the "secular" clergy. Perhaps no man has been more foolishly applauded on the one hand, or more unjustly condemned on the other, than Dunstan; and as I am anxious you should form something like a just opinion of his character, I propose giving you a short sketch of his life, bringing before you both his good points and his bad ones. Dunstan was born of a noble family, in the year 925, at Glastonbury. At this place was a fine old monastery, where a band of learned Irish monks taught the children of those nobles who lived in the neighbourhood. The young Dunstan, who was full of intelligence and perseverance, soon became distinguished among his schoolfathers for his cleverness and ready wit. Unfortunately, instead of checking him, his parents, proud of his superiority, did all in their power to urge him forward, and a brain-fever was the result. There is a curious story told of him, how in his delirium he rushed one night into the church, the roof of which was being restored, and climbing the scaffolding which the workmen had left, he fell down into the aisle, where he was discovered in the morning sleeping quietly and uninjured, the fever having entirely left him. Neither Dunstan nor

his friends could account for a circumstance so unusual, and so they attributed it to a miracle, and regarded it as a proof of his future sanctity.

I have told you of this story about Dunstan, because I think before we condemn him, as many have done, for wilfully imposing on the people the most absurd stories about the devils and angels that appeared to him, we should bear in mind that during all his lifetime he was subject to violent attacks of brain-fever. While these attacks lasted his mind was doubtless haunted by all sorts of wild fancies ; and I have no doubt he felt firmly convinced in his own mind that he really saw and talked with beings from another world ; nor can we blame him for relating to his followers what he himself believed to be the truth. In after years, the monks during their struggle with the clergy were only too glad to exalt their champion Dunstan into a saint, by adding more wonders to these stories. They also took advantage of the credulity of the common people, to make them believe that Dunstan saw and knew more than any ordinary man, and was peculiarly favoured by Heaven.

I have already told you that up to this time the clergy were allowed to marry whenever they chose, and the monks also were frequently married men and had families. Most of the Irish monks of the monastery of Glastonbury had wives. Dunstan having fallen in love with a young Saxon lady

at King Athelstane's court, was most anxious to follow their example. Unfortunately, at this juncture, he applied for advice to his kinsman Elpege, Bishop of Winchester. Elpege strenuously upheld the error which the Popes had begun everywhere to encourage, that it was sinful for any priest to think of marrying, although we are told in the Bible that several of the Apostles were married men, and St. Paul says "marriage is honourable in all," and speaks of bishops having wives. Dunstan's better feelings seem at first to have been shocked by this new idea, but the wily Bishop, seeing the advantage that would accrue to the cause if a clever energetic man like Dunstan were secured on his side, prevailed on him to go and study at a monastery in France, where the Benedictine rule, as it was called, was most strictly observed, and where none of the monks were allowed to marry. Dunstan soon became convinced of the truth of this new system, and threw himself into the cause, with all the energy of his heart and soul^s. On his return to England he regarded his former love for the fair lady as an unholy passion, and bidding a final adieu to her, spent the rest of his days labouring with all the powers of his mind and body to establish the monastic system in its new form in opposition to the plan which had hitherto prevailed. Dunstan soon obtained favour with Edmund, the Saxon

* Dr. Hook's Lives of the Archbishops, vol. i. chap. 7.

King then reigning, who appointed him as his chaplain, or private priest, and gave him the old Abbey of Glastonbury to restore, making him at the same time Abbot.

It is much to be regretted that the new Abbot, in his mistaken zeal for what he considered the true cause, should have turned out all the good Irish monks, and put followers of his own into their places. At the same time we must in justice give him credit for rebuilding the fine old church, and spending a great deal of his own money in improving the monastery, which he further converted into a large and most useful public school. We almost always find that those men who become reformers, as Dunstan did, and try to set things to rights, are very apt to run into extremes, and their followers still more so. When once the tide is turned, it is almost impossible to stem the current; and although, like Dunstan, their intentions may be good, they often defeat their own ends, by going further than is either prudent or right.

The monastic cause was now strengthened by the powerful support of Odo, Archbishop of Canterbury. Odo was the son of a Dane of noble birth, and had been converted to Christianity in early youth by the preaching of a good missionary, who collected a crowd of listeners round him by chanting the Psalms of David. Exiled, as a mad enthusiast, from his father's house, he

clung to the new faith with all the energy of a martyr, glorying to suffer for Christ's cause.

In those days of warfare and bloodshed, even bishops thought that to fight in defence of their country was by no means inconsistent with their holy calling. They took up arms against men who were heathen, whose aim was to destroy not only their liberty but their religion also. Odo was famous for the courage with which he wielded his sword. There is a story told of this warrior bishop, how he saved the good King Athelstane's life in battle. The King was engaged in the hottest part of the field in a hand-to-hand encounter with one of the enemy, when his sword broke off at the hilt, and left him at the mercy of his foe. Odo was at hand: he sprang forward, and gave the King a weapon he had snatched from one of the dead bodies with which the field was strewn. Athelstane made good use of this timely gift, but it was to Odo's promptness and courage that the King owed his life. This was the man that Dunstan afterwards recommended to King Edmund as a fit person to fill the vacant primacy of Canterbury. Odo had studied at the same monastery in France where Dunstan had spent part of his youth, and had returned to England, like his friend, a firm adherent to the monastic rule. As the friendship of these two energetic men increased, you may imagine the cause of the poor married clergy had but little

chance against such powerful opponents. Archbishop Odo's first act was to restore the fine old cathedral of Canterbury, and as he seems to have been an eloquent and powerful preacher, the church was thronged with people. I cannot help thinking that Odo carried too much of his warlike temper into holy matters, and the cruelty which flowed in the blood of all the Danes, comes out at times in his character. He ejected without hesitation and without remorse all married clergy from the cathedrals and monasteries, and, fired with a mistaken zeal, was by no means scrupulous in the means he employed to gain his end.

I wonder if you remember reading the sad history of the young Saxon King Edwy and his Queen. It is so connected with the history of Dunstan and Odo, that I will briefly relate the circumstances to you. When you have heard it I am sure you will not be surprised that the young King should have hated Dunstan and his cause. Edwy greatly loved his young and beautiful cousin Elgiva, and determined, notwithstanding the threats of Dunstan and the Archbishop, on making her his wife, although the Pope thought fit to declare that marriage between cousins was a deadly sin. The wedding was solemnized in secret. Shortly afterwards the young King was crowned in state by Odo, and at the conclusion of the ceremony, he adjourned to the banqueting-hall, where Dunstan was present among

the other guests. In those rude Saxon times, a great deal of noisy rioting and drinking accompanied these entertainments, and Edwy, yearning for the gentle society of his wife, made his escape from the scene of revelry and hastened to Elgiva's bower. Dunstan's fiery temper was roused by what he considered a gross insult to those present, and rushing into the Queen's apartment, he dragged the young King by main force from her arms, and compelled him to take his place again at the table. Edwy never forgave the affront, and Dunstan and Odo became his bitter enemies. This is a rough and startling story, doubtless, for our polished age to dwell upon, but those Saxon times were rude and rough, and we have no right to judge the characters of those days without taking this fact into consideration.

The end of the story of poor Edwy and Elgiva is sadder than its beginning, and is a mournful proof of the terrible effect of religious zeal carried to excess. Odo pronounced a sentence of divorce between the King and Queen, but Edwy proudly resisted, and when his wife was torn from his arms, by order of the ruthless Prelate, he tried, but in vain, to enable her to return. Her cruel enemies branded her in the face, hoping thus to destroy her beauty, but recovering from her wounds, she was hastening to rejoin her husband, when she was stopped at Gloucester, and cruelly murdered by the Saxon mob. Edwy, her discon-

solate husband, died shortly after broken-hearted. Sad as is the idea this story gives us of the cruelty of those unsettled times, it is a relief to find that Archbishop Odo died four months before the young Queen's murder; so we dare not accuse him, as some modern writers have done, of encouraging a deed so utterly unworthy of a minister of God.

CHAPTER XX.

DUNSTAN BECOMES ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.—HIS WISE AND POLITIC CONDUCT.—HIS LAST SERMON AND DEATH.—HIS CHARACTER.—ETHELRED'S UNHAPPY REIGN.—MASSACRE OF THE DANES.—THEIR FEARFUL VENGEANCE.—SIEGE AND SACK OF CANTERBURY.—ARCHBISHOP ELPEGE'S BRAVERY AND GOODNESS.—HIS MARTYRDOM.—DEPLORABLE STATE OF THE COUNTRY.

[A.D. 959—1012.] BEFORE the sad events recorded in my last chapter had taken place, Dunstan, powerful as he was, had been banished the kingdom by order of Edwy, but shortly before the King's death he returned to England, and, as the chief friend and adviser of Edgar, the brother of Edwy^h, he became daily more and more powerful.

It is but justice to this great man to state, that

^h Edwy was not yet dead, but shared the kingdom with his brother. He died shortly after Dunstan's return, and then Edgar became sole sovereign of England.

he seems to have felt considerable remorse for his rough treatment of young Edwy, although that King had shewn himself his sworn enemy, and had himself been the means of the Abbot's banishment. Dunstan's prosperity was now at its height. He accepted the two bishoprics of Worcester and London, and not long after, he was further raised to the primacy of Canterbury. In this important post he found full scope for his power and energy.

Edgar, from all accounts, was a wild unprincipled youth ; he cared but little for the prosperity of his kingdom, entrusting all matters of importance to Dunstan, that he might be at liberty to spend his time in rioting and amusement. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that Edgar's reign was a glorious one for England, and as we have seen the King himself took little or no interest in public matters, we must in common justice give the Archbishop credit for the flourishing condition of the country. Dunstan was a courageous man, and when the King had committed a very sinful act, he openly reproved him. On a certain public occasion, Edgar as usual offered him his hand, which the Archbishop refused to take, saying, "I can no longer remain the friend of one who has made Almighty God his enemy." Edgar, fearing to offend so powerful an ally, submitted quietly to the penance Dunstan commanded. We cannot but regret that instead of telling the King

he must give up his sins, and ask God's pardon and forgiveness for the past, Dunstan should have allowed him to think that mere outward acts of penance, such as "fasting," or watching night and day in the church, could wash out his sins in God's sight. As it was, Edgar's heart still remained impure, and when the appointed time of penance was over, he returned once more to his old evil ways. Dunstan, however, performed his duty well, as ruler of the kingdom. The Danes were in a great measure subdued, the navy improved and increased, and justice was wisely administered. Dunstan survived Edgar, who died in the year 975, but he was now an old man; and although he lived nearly thirteen years longer, his power and influence were on the decline, and he met with much opposition from the other party, who had espoused the cause of the married clergy.

You have heard of the miserable state of England during the reign of Ethelred the Unready, as he is called, and the dreadful havoc made by the Danes. During the first few years of the young King's reign Dunstan was the chief ruler, and affairs were in a more hopeful condition, but at his death in 988 the state of the kingdom was very gloomy. Dunstan preached his last sermon on Ascension Day, but he was so weak that he had to retire several times from the pulpit during his discourse. "He spoke of our Lord's love in saving

mankind, and dilated in fervent words on the bliss of heaven, exhorting his hearers to ascend in their hearts to that blessed place, whither their Saviour had gone before. With affectionate words he bade them remember him when he was gone, as he felt this must be the last time he could address them¹.” On the following Saturday he expired (after receiving the Holy Communion) uttering these beautiful words of praise; “Glory to Thee, Almighty Father, who hast provided for them that love Thee the bread of life, that we may ever be mindful of Thy wonderful mercy in sending to us Thine only-begotten Son, born of the Virgin Mary: glory to Thee, O heavenly Father, for when we were not, Thou didst give unto us existence, and when we were sinners Thou didst grant unto us a Saviour: glory to Thee, through the same Thy Son, our Lord and God, who with Thee and the Holy Ghost dost govern all things, world without end.”

Before we proceed, let us dwell for a little time on the character of this great man. Whatever opinion we form of Dunstan, he was certainly the most remarkable man of his age. Although we may find fault with many of his actions, and although we may think that the means he employed to gain his ends were often unlawful, we must confess that he had the good of his country at heart. At the time he lived, great ignorance for

¹ Dr. Hook's Lives of the Archbishops, vol. i. p. 421.

the most part prevailed among the people, so that they were easily led to believe any ridiculous story or wonder that they might hear related; and Dunstan, eager to advance his cause, which he believed to be the true one, took perhaps undue advantage of this feeling. The marvellous visions he fancied he had seen, during his attack of delirium, were all made to impress and influence the minds of the people, who soon began to regard him as something more than mortal, and the cause for which he struggled was looked upon as the cause of Heaven. Again, we cannot but blame the unwise zeal Dunstan shewed in compelling the people to adopt the Benedictine rule, which I told you was quite a new thing in England. I am sure Dunstan could never have foreseen the evil that would arise from the extreme strictness of the rules he enforced on the monks. Before his time, any one wishing to live in a monastery could afterwards leave it if he felt so disposed: now he had, on entering the monastery, to make a solemn vow before God never to quit the spot on pain of losing eternal life; he was allowed to receive no presents, and all his property belonged henceforth to the monastery. At first, children educated in the monastery, as they grew up, were permitted and even encouraged to become monks, but were never compelled to do so against their will; but under the new rule parents might dedicate their children to a monastic life, and oblig-

them against their will to take Orders. We know that an unwilling service, such as theirs must have been, could have found but little favour in God's sight.

Now that I have pointed out the defects in Dunstan's conduct, let us try and remember some of the good traits in his character. He appears to have been deeply read in the Holy Scriptures, and he persuaded King Edgar to send at his own expense copies of the Bible to the different churches for the instruction of the people, and to publish a code of laws full of wisdom and justice. Dunstan was an admirable preacher; crowds flocked to listen to his eloquent and fluent sermons, for he was a clever man, and famous for his success in argument. Like Wilfrid, he everywhere encouraged the building of churches and monasteries, and was most clever himself at carving in stone and carpentering, besides being able to illuminate or paint manuscripts in the most beautiful manner.

Dunstan was a man of powerful will, strong energy, and possessed a very hasty temper; and although we find that he agreed with the Pope in many of his false notions, he cared no more for his authority than he did for the King's. Before we take leave of this great man, I will just mention one or two of the good rules he made for his clergy. First, he ordered "that no priest should interfere with another in anything that concerned his parish or church, or any of the

things that belonged to him. That every Christian man diligently win his child to Christianity, and teach him the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, and that men on holy days forbear heathenish songs and diabolical sports. That people abstain on Sundays from markets and business. That all things belonging to the Church be cleanly and decently ordered, and that priests preach to the people on Sundays, and always set them a good example."

I have already told you that Ethelred's reign was a very sad one for England. In the year 989 Sirc became Archbishop of Canterbury, and the cowardly advice he gave the King with regard to the Danes, proved of infinite harm to the nation. Instead of meeting the enemy, as Dunstan had advised, with promptness and energy, he persuaded Ethelred to bribe them with large sums of money to retire. As you may imagine, this plan made them the more eager to advance, and the ravages they committed were terrible. I have already told you that many of the Danes gave up their roving habits, and settled in different parts of the conquered country, where some of them became the guests of the Saxons, and lived in their families. It was about the year 1002 that Ethelred planned and executed a most horrible deed. He secretly commanded the murder of all those Danes who had settled peaceably in the country. Can we wonder that a deed so full of treachery and

cruelty was visited by God with a signal retribution. The Danes, burning with vengeance, collected all their forces, and attacking the country at all points, spread death and desolation wherever they came. At this juncture the good Elpege, a man greatly respected for his holy and consistent life, was raised to the See of Canterbury. The people now hoped for better times; but Elpege, holy as he was, could not restrain the fury of the heathen Danes, and when they appeared before the walls of the ancient city of Canterbury, all he could do was to remain nobly at his post, and by his example encourage his people to face death like Christians. When advised to fly, he exclaimed, "God forbid that I should tarnish my character by so inglorious an action, and be afraid to go to heaven because a violent death may lead me there." For twenty days the citizens, encouraged by the example of this brave man, successfully defended their beloved city from the enemy. Every day the good Archbishop knelt with his people in the cathedral, and animated them to fresh energy. He reminded them of the fortitude of the early martyrs, how they had held out under torture, and triumphed over the malice of their enemies. Alas! all their faith was needed to bear up against the horrors of their position: the city was betrayed, and the bloody work of massacre began. The ruthless pagans spared neither sex nor age; women were tortured and mur-

dered, and little children thrown under the wheels of the passing wagons, or tossed in the air upon the points of pikes. The venerable Archbishop, groaning with anguish at the dreadful scene, bravely advanced in front of the enemy, hoping to awe them by his calm bearing and earnest words. “Blemish not your manhood,” he cried, “by destroying defenceless women and innocent babes, but wreak your vengeance on an old man, who is in a high position, and whose death may possibly bring you some renown.” Instead of listening to his words, the Danes seized Elpege, and after compelling him to witness the burning of the fine old cathedral, and the murder of all his monks, they kept him in close confinement, hoping to obtain a large ransom for his release. Gladly would the people have offered any sum in their power to save him, but the good old man refused to receive their offerings, saying that at such a time of misery as this they had no right to rob either the Church or the country of money for his sake. Enraged and disappointed, the cruel Danes, while engaged in a drunken revel, ordered the Archbishop to be brought out, and barbarously slew him with the bones that remained after their feasting was over. Elpege was a true martyr; he died for the sake of his religion and his God: and he was a true patriot also; he fought for his country while he was able, and cheerfully endured a cruel death rather than

allow his Church and people to suffer. Doubtless during this season of misery and distress the Saxons prayed with all their hearts to God for help; we are told that the third Psalm, beginning, "Lord! how are they increased that trouble me," was ordered to be chanted in their churches, and a fresh sentence added to the litany, which gives us a vivid idea of the terror inspired by their heathen foes, "That it may please thee to quell the cruelty of our pagan enemies. We beseech Thee to hear us, good Lord!"



CHAPTER XXI.

FLIGHT OF ETHELRED AND HIS FAMILY INTO NORMANDY.

—HIS SON EDMUND IRONSIDES DIVIDES THE KINGDOM WITH THE DANISH KING CANUTE.—CANUTE'S HOLINESS AND WISDOM.—HIS WISE POLICY WITH REGARD TO THE GOVERNMENT OF ENGLAND.—ARCHBISHOP ETHELNOTH.

—HE RESTORES CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL.—LADY GODIVA.—EDWARD THE CONFESSOR.—HIS FAVOUR TO THE NORMANS.—THE NORMAN CONQUEST.—CONCLUSION.

[A.D. 1012—1066.] THE Danes under their leader Sweyn now made such advances that Ethelred with his wife and two sons basely deserted their country, and took refuge in Normandy. So great was the power of the Danes, that on Sweyn's death, his son, the celebrated Canute, was pro-

* Churton's Early English Church, p. 233.

claimed by his party King of England. Ethelred was afterwards prevailed on to return, and after fighting several bloody battles with Canute, ended his troubles and life in the year 1016. His son Edmund Ironsides was a brave prince, and determined if possible to secure the crown for himself; but he appears to have shrunk from exposing his poor subjects to so many deadly encounters. There is a quaint story told by an old writer, of how Edmund proposed to Canute that they should decide the matter by single combat, "that their hands might not be stained with the blood of so many of their faithful subjects." Canute, however, refused the encounter altogether, saying, with considerable self-conceit, "Although my courage is great, I dare not trust my small person against so bulky an antagonist as thyself; therefore let us divide the country, and remain at peace¹." Fortunately, this wise, though cautious proposition was accepted, but Edmund dying shortly afterwards, Canute became sole sovereign of England, and in order to conciliate the Saxons he married Emma, the widowed Queen of Ethelred. As you have read the history of England, I need hardly remind you that Canute had already become a Christian. His conversion was thorough and sincere: few characters shew more completely the softening influence of the Christian faith, and its superiority over the heathen religion of the

¹ William of Malmesbury, p. 195.

Danes. Like St. Paul, Canute had formerly taken delight in persecution and cruelty of all kinds, but shortly after the blessed change had taken place, he set his subjects a noble example of wisdom, humility, and gentleness. Assisted by the good Archbishop Ethelnoth, who was his most intimate friend and companion, and a Saxon by birth, he enacted many good and just laws, and gained the confidence of both Danes and Saxons by the wise policy he displayed. Equal justice was meted out to both parties, and the Saxons were conciliated in many ways; his efforts were rewarded by a reign of peace and prosperity; war no longer desolated the country, for Danes and Saxons had become one nation. I am sure you will be glad also to learn that Canute encouraged the married clergy, and tried to subdue the power of the monks. Archbishop Ethelnoth, his friend, was himself a secular clergyman, and as there appears to have been no opposition whatever to his appointment, it looks as if Canute managed this matter with his usual wisdom and moderation. We cannot help feeling very sorry that Canute's wise policy was not followed by future sovereigns, since under the Norman kings the monks finally prevailed, and long years of error and oppression followed, which I am sure the free spirit of the Anglo-Saxon would never have endured, had they not been overpowered, and in time united with their more polished but servile

Norman conquerors. We are told that Canute repaired throughout England the monasteries^m, which had been partly destroyed by the Danes under himself or his father. He built churches in all the places where he had fought, and appointed clergy to minister in them. Meanwhile Archbishop Ethelnoth, we are told, "encouraged the King in all his good actions, and restrained him in his excesses." There is an interesting letter still existing which Canute wrote to his friend Ethelnoth, while he was absent on a journey to Rome. Anxious for the welfare of his people, Canute had visited that city in the hope of bringing back some good rules for their benefit. After speaking of the gracious manner in which he had been received, he adds, "Be it known to you all that I have vowed to God Himself henceforward to reform my life in all things, and justly and piously to govern the kingdoms and the people subject to me, and have determined, through God's assistance, to make amends for anything hitherto unjustly done, either through the intemperance of my youth, or through negligence; therefore I call to witness and command my counsellors to whom I have entrusted the care of my kingdom, that they, by no means, either through fear of myself, or favour to any powerful person, suffer henceforth any injustice, or cause

^m William of Malmesbury, p. 198.

such to be done in all my kingdomⁿ." We may be sure that the good Archbishop saw that these wise injunctions were carried out.

Among other good things Ethelnoth restored Canterbury Cathedral. This fine old church was associated in the minds of the people with all that was most sacred and ancient in the history of their religion; and greatly they must have rejoiced to see it rise again from its ruins. Ethelnoth also caused the remains of the martyr Elpege to be decently interred under its holy roof. He shortly after died, A.D. 1038, having survived his friend and sovereign three years.

I wonder if you have ever read our poet Tennyson's fine verses on the story of the Lady Godiva; the record of the noble deed she performed for the citizens of Coventry has been handed down to us by their grateful descendants ever since the days of King Canute; it is interesting to know that Archbishop Ethelnoth was this lady's intimate friend^o, and can we wonder that the same Christian spirit which inspired him animated her also? Lady Godiva and her husband Earl Leofric built many monasteries: the monastery at Coventry had been destroyed by the Danes, this the "grim Earl" rebuilt, and decorated it at his own expense with a great many costly ornaments.

ⁿ William of Malmesbury, p. 202.

^o Dr. Hook's Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury, vol. i. p. 481.

The church at Stow in Lincolnshire was also probably built by them: parts of it still remain, which clearly belong to this early age^p.

We are now at the conclusion of our history of the early days of the English Church, approaching a period when another great change takes place. The two sons of Canute reigned but a few years, and Edward the Confessor, the son of Ethelred, who, you remember, had taken refuge in Normandy, became king. Both Danes and Saxons seem to have agreed in inviting him over, although by this act they were preparing the way for what at first sight seemed a dire calamity for their country. Edward was by birth a Norman; his early life had been spent among foreigners, and all his interest centred in the Norman party; we cannot therefore be surprised at his shewing favour to those Norman clergy who had instructed him, and under whose influence he had been brought up. He created Robert, a Norman monk, Archbishop of Canterbury, and raised another Norman to the see of London. All this of course caused a good deal of jealousy among the English, but on the whole the reign of Edward was a peaceable one for our country.

The name of Edward the Confessor will ever be associated in the minds of Englishmen with the building of our fine old Westminster Abbey. This ancient edifice was consecrated in the year 1065,

^p Parker on Gothic Architecture, p. 17.

only a few days before the King's death. After the year 1000, stone monasteries and churches seem quite to have taken the place of the wooden buildings raised by the Saxons. We are told that in England, as well as in France and Italy, "nearly all the bishops' seats, churches, and monasteries, were changed for better ones, and the world seemed putting off its old dingy attire, and putting on a new robe ^a."

We have seen how active Canute was in the good work of building and restoring churches: those he erected were of stone. But under the Norman kings, architecture improved rapidly, and the most beautiful and costly churches arose throughout the land. The Saxons do not appear to have excelled much in this respect; even Westminster Abbey was built by Norman architects, and under its ancient roof the sovereigns of England, from the time of Edward the Confessor to the present day, have always been crowned.

It is here quite needless for me to dwell upon the great event which decided the fate of the last of the Anglo-Saxon kings. I am sure you have read many times in your History the story of the death of Harold, the brave son of Earl Godwin, on the bloody field of Hastings. William Duke of Normandy, and cousin of Edward the Confessor, ascended the throne; and henceforth Britons, Anglo-Saxons, Danes, and Normans, became one

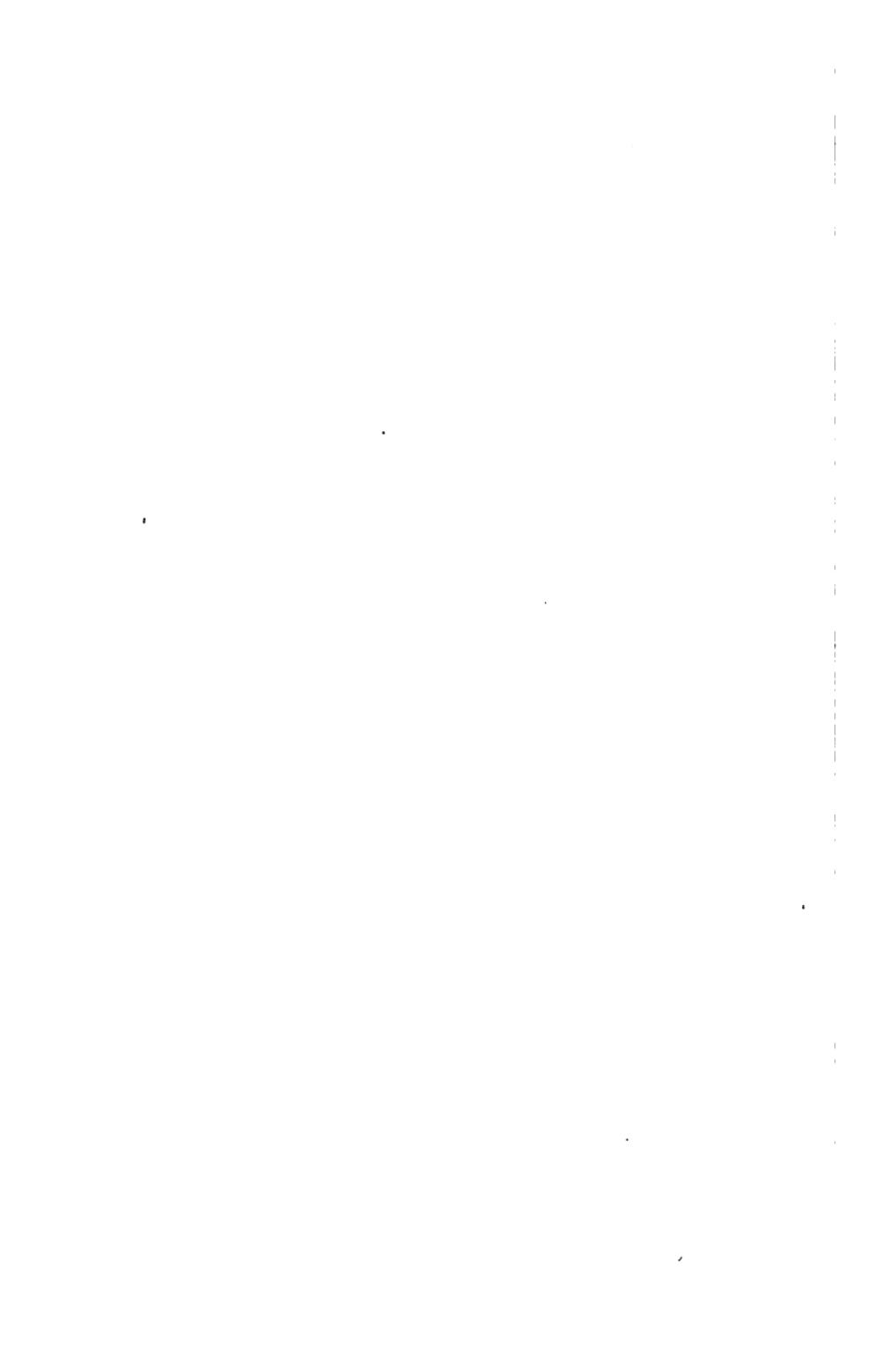
^a Parker on Gothic Architecture, p. 17.

nation. You may be sure, however, that a great change like this could not be effected without much misery and heart-burning; but if you have carefully followed me through this little History, you will have seen how God in past times preserved the English Church in safety through the greatest perils. And though a dark cloud of error and superstition hung over her for a time, God overruled all for the ultimate benefit of His people.

In reading the past history of Christianity in England, we have every reason to thank God for preserving His truth, and for handing it down to us through so many ages. And while we confidently pray "that God will continue to cleanse and defend His Church, and preserve it evermore by His help and goodness," may we as members of this Church do all in our power to influence others in its favour by leading holy and consistent lives, that God's blessing may continue to rest upon it for evermore.

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